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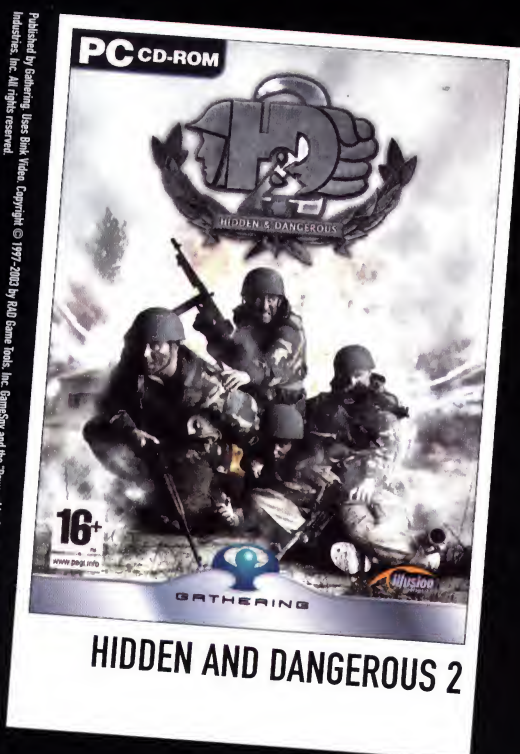
THE MASQUERADE - BLOODLINES**Half-Life 2 takes a walk on the dark side****REVIEWED****COMMAND & CONQUER
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PACIFIC ASSAULT****ARMED &
DANGEROUS****WORDS OF
EVERQUEST****THE SIMS 2****MASSIVE
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Game...

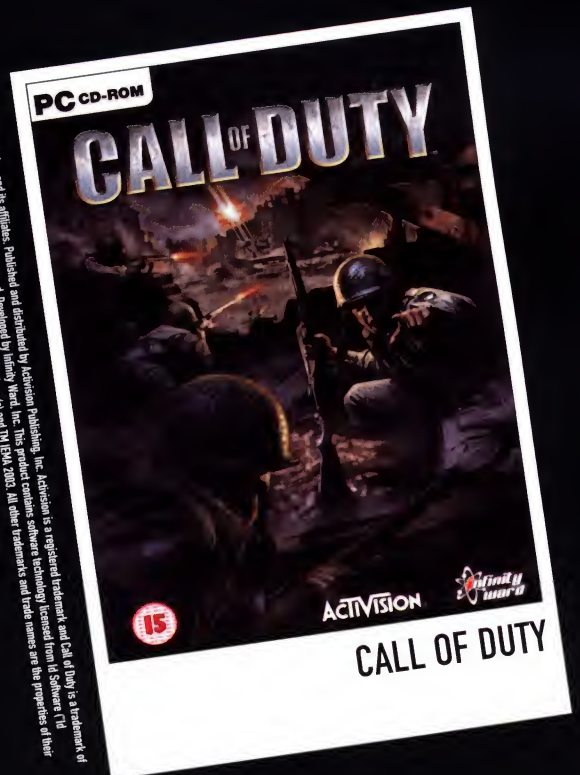
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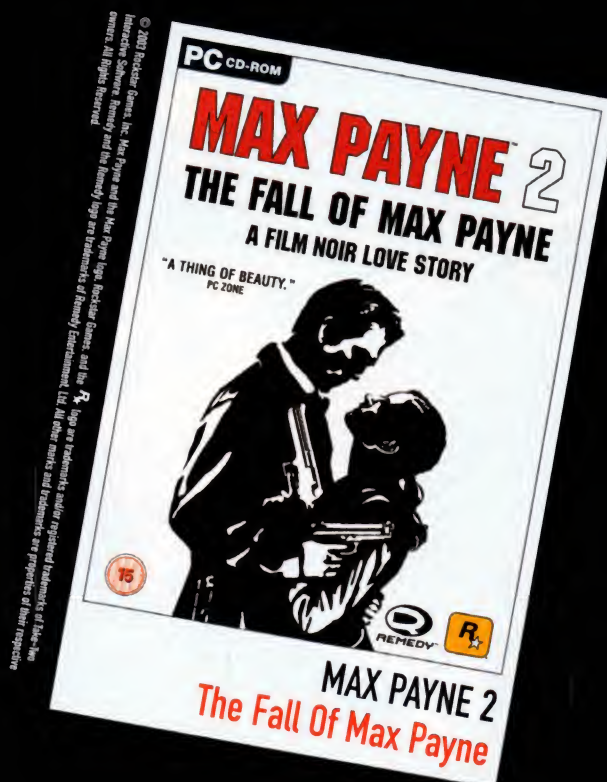
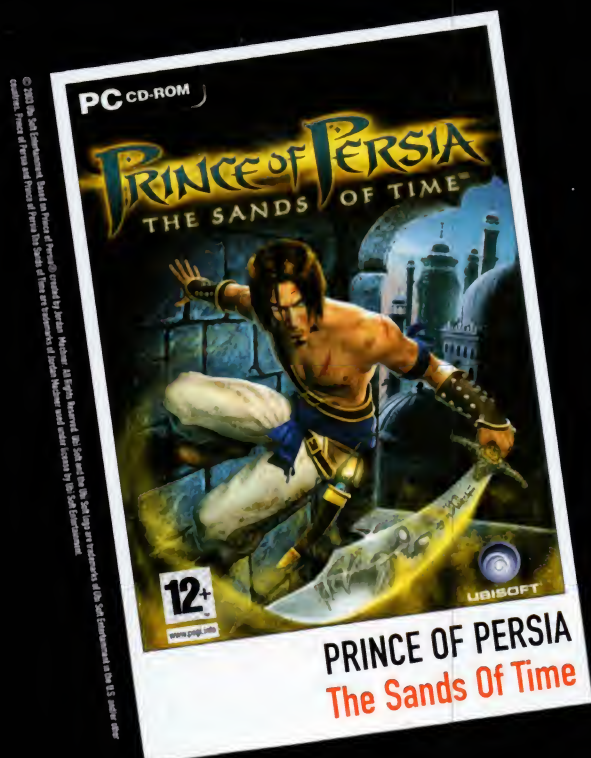
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*(Translation: Hey, Captain! Your airplane's on fire.)



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**VAMPIRE:
THE MASQUERADE -
BLOODLINES** P30

World exclusive preview of the stunning *Half-Life 2*-driven RPG that you can really sink your teeth into

**Born Slippy**

Christmas can be an exceptionally slippery time, as old people and PC games know all too well. We were hoping to review *Half-Life 2* this month but, after someone hacked into Valve and stole the source code, the latest

word is that the game's been pushed back until Spring 2004. If that wasn't enough to make you weep into your mince pies, we also lost *Breed* (we were actually sent code for this, but it was so obviously unfinished we had to send it back with a polite note, only to receive word almost immediately that the game is now set for 2004). Add to that list *Contract J.A.C.K.* and our original cover game *Unreal Tournament 2004*, which was snatched from under our noses at the last second. In the latter instance it was a case of 'yep, it's going to be ready', 'yep, it's nearly finished', to 'actually, it's going to be another couple of months'. January 2004 is the latest date we've been given.

Now I know that developing a game isn't a scientific art, but surely things can't change that suddenly and drastically without someone having an inkling that the game isn't going to be ready on time? In fact, whoever thought the *Breed* code we were sent was finished should be taken out into the snow and shot.

There is another way: take *Max Payne 2*, a game that was announced at the same time as *Half-Life 2* (May this year), but which is now on sale, without any obvious bugs and full of the sort of action that's bagged it a Classic award. And, in case you thought this column was unnecessarily gloomy for a Christmas issue, that's not the only bit of good news. After failing to give a game 90 per cent or more for the past five issues, we've got **THREE** this month. And it's lucky, because if these three games had slipped I might well have been tempted to slope down to the pub after making an announcement that 'PC ZONE has been unavoidably delayed and will now be out sometime in the second half of next year'. If it's good enough for the goose...

Dave Woods
Editor

**PRINCE OF PERSIA:
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World exclusive review! The Prince returns in this magnificent 3D action adventure

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■ SEVEN EXCLUSIVE DEMOS...

Pro Evolution Soccer 3, *FIFA 2004*, *Chicago 1930*, *Lords Of EverQuest*, *Vegas: Make It Big*, *Tiger Woods 2004* and *XIII* (multiplayer). Plus a taste of *Halo: Combat Evolved*.

■ DVD EXCLUSIVE

EIGHT demos exclusive to the DVD, including *Apocalyptica*, *Silent Hill 3*, *Beyond Good & Evil*, *Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter*, *Savage*, *Space Colony*, *The Hobbit* and *Yager*, plus inside footage from *FIFA 2004*.



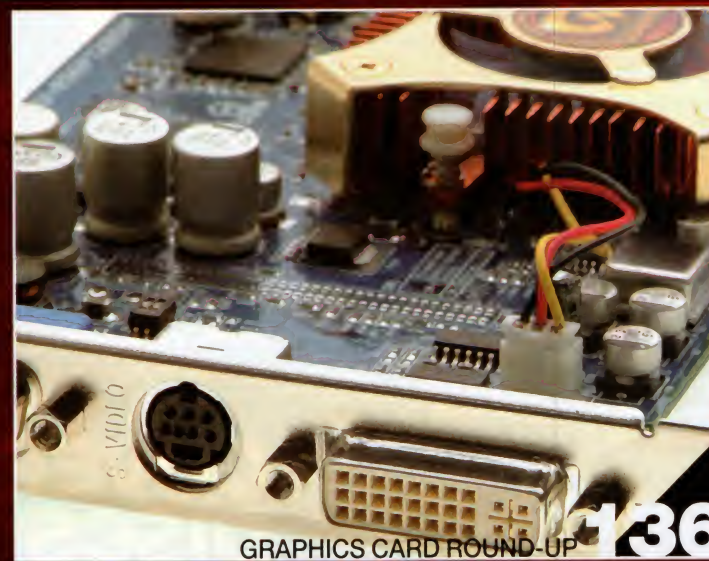


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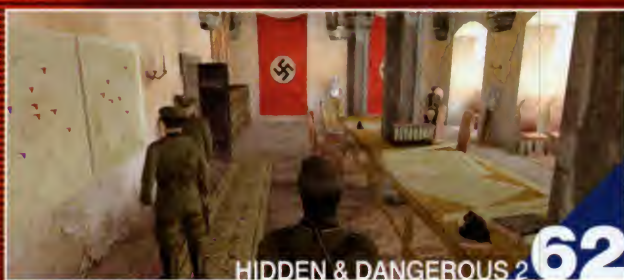
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WIN! TINY COMPO Correctly answer this month's cover question and you could win some goodies. Send your entry on a postcard addressed to: Tiny Compo (136), PC ZONE, 9 Dallington Street, London EC1V 0BQ. The first entry with the correct answer plucked out of the hat wins a mystery prize. The editor's decision is final. Closing date: December 10, 2003. The winner of our November cover (134) is Mr D Arden, who knew the four Dark Judges from *Judge Dredd* are: Death, Fire, Fear and Mortis. Good on ya, muscles.

PPA

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ALL THE NEWS, VIEWS AND RUMOURS FROM THE WORLD OF PC GAMING

BULLETIN

ANNUS HORRIBILIS

■ ASSOCIATE EDITOR Jamie Sefton

▲ Poor Valve. What began in April as a triumphant revelation that *Half-Life 2* would be launched on September 30 – after five years of development – has ended in the game's source code being stolen by a devious hacker and released on the Internet.

What was so shocking was that the *HL2* source code wasn't leaked by a malicious employee or a third-party company with an early Beta version, but it was nabbed from deep within Valve's vaults. For a company that prides itself on its independence and ability to control every aspect of its games, from development through to promotion, this is a cruel blow. *HL2*'s publisher VU Games has stated that the game will now have to be put back until April 2004, however Valve still insists that Gordon Freeman will be battling alien scum before Christmas. As soon as we know, you'll know.

Yet this hasn't been the end of Valve's woes, as the single-player version of *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero*, has now changed developer for the fourth time. After we reviewed final code somewhat critically in issue 132, Valve realised that the Ritual-developed section of the game just wasn't up to scratch, and has gone back to the mission-based bot-heavy version that Gearbox delivered to them over year ago, with AI experts Turtle Rock at the helm (see facing page).

While I'm convinced this will result in a much-improved *Condition Zero*, it has given Valve more headaches at a time when the company should be riding high in the PC charts. Let's just hope this is the end of Valve's 2003 nightmares and we can look forward to caning both games soon. Meanwhile, there's always *Max Payne 2*, *Knights Of The Old Republic*, *Call Of Duty*...



Find the thief and set the monsters on to him.

HALF-LIFE 2 - NICKED!

FANS MAY HAVE TO WAIT TILL APRIL, FOLLOWING THE SOURCE CODE HACKING AND ILLEGAL INTERNET RELEASE OF VALVE'S SUPER-SEQUEL

DEVELOPER VALVE has suffered a disastrous theft of a major part of the *Half-Life 2* source code by a malicious hacker, who has since released a rudimentary version but playable version of the game on the Internet. Gabe Newell, founder of Valve, announced the leak via a forum post, in which he gave details of how the hacker designed a virus that dodged normal firewall defences and delivered a "keystroke recorder" program into his and other employees' computers last September.

Although Newell noticed his computer behaving erratically and reformatted his hard drive, the hacker was still receiving information on crucial passwords and access codes, allowing him to download part of *Half-Life 2*'s source code.

The immediate effect has meant another delay to the launch of *Half-Life 2* from September 30 to maybe even as late as April next year, according to publisher VU Games. Valve will now have to re-write parts of the source code to prevent online multiplayer cheating or other hackers gaining unmitigated access to Valve's Steam servers that the company was planning to use for the online distribution of *Half-Life 2*.

THE INDUSTRY BITES BACK

There have been other famous game leaks over the years, most recently id's *Doom 3* last year, but the actual theft of *Half-Life 2* code from deep within the heart of Valve has sent shockwaves through the industry, and condemnation has been swift.

President of Gearbox Randy Pitchford, who has worked with Valve on *Half-Life*

expansion packs such as *Blue Shift*, told *PC ZONE*: "For a game developer, data is life blood – if it is compromised completely and continually, we die painfully and rapidly. At Gearbox, the storage and safety of our data is the highest budgeted part of our physical infrastructure."

Tim Ansell, founder of The Creative Assembly (makers of the forthcoming *Rome: Total War*), was equally appalled: "The frustrating thing is that the people who download and distribute this code are games fans, yet it is things like this that can greatly damage what they love. I feel very sorry for Valve. I just hope one day that odious little parasite who stole the *Half-Life 2* source code will lose something he's worked hard for all his life."

HACKED OFF

But what about the hacking community? Much of it is split between those who feel Valve didn't do enough to protect its game, and others who think the hacking will give the whole online community a bad name. "To me, as a professional developer myself, I feel that the theft alone is morally wrong," said notorious coder Joolz to *PC ZONE*. "I mean, the hacker who did it shouldn't have done it. It's illegal, it's theft. However, the method they used to get into the network just proves that Valve, like many other companies, do not take security seriously enough."

Here at *PC ZONE* we absolutely deplore this appalling crime and ask you to help Valve by passing on any information you

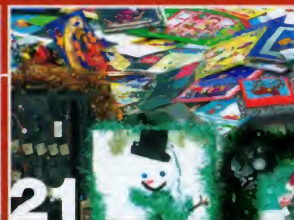




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"Gimme a game or the Japanese schoolgirl gets it!"



Wait! Wait! Wait!

Counter-Strike's Back

TURTLE ROCK STUDIOS BECOMES THE FIFTH - YES, FIFTH - DEVELOPER OF COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO

VALVE'S COUNTER-STRIKE: *Condition Zero*, the single-player version of the world's most popular online shooter, has been handed over to developer Turtle Rock studios for final work before its release at the end of November. After *PC ZONE*'s lukewarm review of 'final' code from Valve itself back in issue 132 and other negative community feedback, the company decided to take the game back into development.

"Around June or so of this year, we were finalising *CS: Condition Zero* and sent a few copies out for review," says Valve's Doug Lombardi. "However, the early reviews lead us to the conclusion that there was more work to be done - specifically bringing the bot play to the forefront. We're very happy with the end result and look forward to releasing the game in November."

It appears that only 12 of the 18 levels of developer Ritual's conventional first-person

shooter part of the game have been salvaged as 'Deleted Scenes', with the major part of the single-player game going back to previous developer Gearbox's original vision of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*-style challenge-based missions involving bots.

Now that the game will be somewhat different from the one we originally reviewed, *PC ZONE* will, of course, be re-reviewing *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero* as soon as it's released. Because we were the first to review *Condition Zero*, we think we can honestly say that *PC ZONE* saved the world from a disappointingly average shooter.

- Publisher: VU Games
- Developer: Valve/Rogue/Gearbox/Ritual/Turtle Rock
- ETA: November
- Website: www.cs-conditionzero.com



"What happens is that if your first fist - your first fist?! - if your first kiss fails, you have a negative memory!"

The Sims 2 senior producer Tim LeTourneau makes a worrying Freudian slip.

"Fk you all, you bunch of f**ks. I'm going back to Australia!"**

*ZONE's Anthony Holden, after realising his StreetFighter 2 defeat at the hands of new disc editor Suzy Wallace was witnessed by the entire team.**

"Shakespeare was the one who best described the supreme sin 'the doubt', because what can be worse than doubting the existence of God? They say this is what everything else is based upon, as if there is faith, there is peace, love and understanding amongst people. 'To be or not to be' became this way the expression of the worst nightmare of the Christian religion. I began my review like this because when I installed Knightshift I had the same kind of feeling. Is it a pure RTS or a simplified RPG?"

The best review ever.
Found on www.gamerankings.com.

*We have been advised to mention for legal reasons that the end results were 3-2 in Holdo's favour, but there were no witnesses to this.

AUTHENTIC ATTACK

IT'S ASSAULT AND PEPPER AS CODIE'S FORTHCOMING RTS SETS NEW BENCHMARKS IN REALISM

ANAL. IT'S a rude word, but depending on the videos you watch and the games you play it can be a good thing. And if you understand the word to mean "ferociously attentive to detail" then forthcoming RTS *Wartime Command: Battle For Europe 1939-45* should be right up your - er - alley.

- Publisher: Codemasters
- Developer: 1C
- ETA: Spring 04
- Website: www.codemasters.co.uk/wartimecommand

Recently renamed from the working title *Battlefield Command*, the game is based on technology developed for the brilliant *IL-2 Sturmovik*. Russian developer 1C is recreating over 300 individual vehicles, planes and weapons for the game, based on military blueprints, technical information and photographic references. With an ultra-realistic physics engine, ballistics, armour and projectiles are being jiggled for total realism: turrets will fly from tank bodies, tracks will be blown off and shell holes will pepper your armaments. Full preview soon.



French villages looked like this, before exploding.



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EMULATION ZONE

BREAKING NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF EMULATION, WITH RETRO REANIMATOR STUART CAMPBELL

ANOTHER FINE EMULATOR YOU'VE GOT ME INTO

CRUSADING investigative journalism is all very well, but at the end of the day there's nothing Emulation Zone likes better than puerile schoolboy humour. Thus your beloved reporter always allows himself a little chuckle when the updating of an emu allows for headlines like this one, seen recently on top emu site Retrogames: "A NEW MESS HAS BEEN RELEASED." Fnark!

MESS, which is long overdue a proper mention on these pages, stands, rather strainingly, for Multiple Emulator Super System. It's yet another in the long line of spin-offs from the greatest piece of PC coding of all time, the arcade emulator MAME. Rather than arcade games, however, MESS emulates home console and computer systems – a staggering 152 of them – dating back to the Commodore PET of the '70s and right up to platforms as recent as the GameBoy Color, and covering just about anything that ever happened in home gaming in between.

It's the only place where ageing emu fans will find emulation of all the strange and obscure formats that they read about in the games magazines of the early '80s, where upwards of 20 formats all struggled for supremacy at the same time, before inevitably being crushed by the juggernauts of the Spectrum and C64. Machines like the PDP-1 (home of *Space War*, generally considered the first videogame ever), the Sord M5, the Bally Astrocade, the Emerson Arcadia 2001 (a futuristically-titled but primitive console actually dating from 1982), the Quickshot Supervision (a short-lived GameBoy wannabe from the people who made the '80s favourite joysticks),

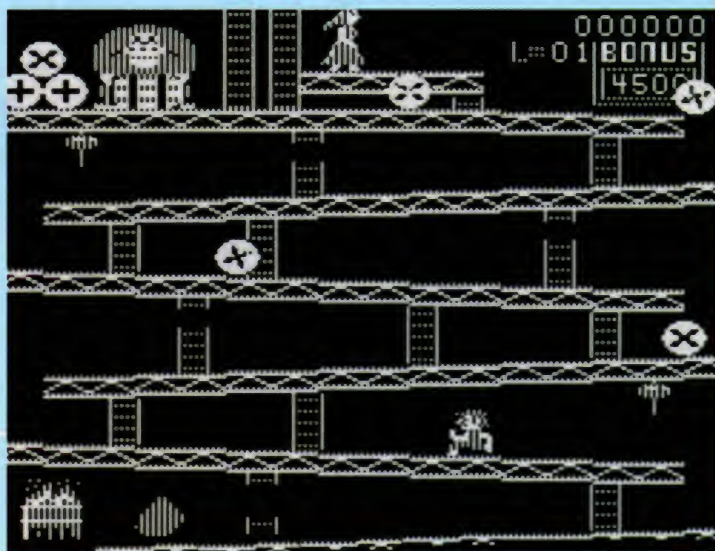
"MESS emulates a staggering 152 home console and computer systems"



The Vectrex; last bastion of sticking coloured plastic over the screen.

the Memotech MTX512... they're all here, each one bringing a thrill to the hearts of perhaps as many as seven or eight people.

The best thing about MESS, however, is that it also rescues some obscure but great machines that were previously emulated only by DOS programs, and which had hence been lost to posterity



Trust us, you don't want to see the Dragon 32 in "colour" mode.

all over again with the advent of stupid incompatible operating systems like Windows XP, which simply refuse point-blank to run most old MS-DOS progs – because that would be, y'know, useful in a supposedly backwards-compatible hardware platform like the PC.

Historic systems, like the Vectrex and the Dragon 32, can now only be run – by

most people, anyway – with the help of MESS, and for that alone this enormous, sprawling, ludicrously ambitious programme deserves a more generous share of the acclaim more regularly piled on its illustrious parent. [E]

LINKS

mess.org – MESS homepage



EMULATION OF THE MONTH

THE RAT (SPECTRUM, 1984, SCORPION SOFTWARE)

Everyone's getting terribly excited these days about *Republic: The Revolution*, what with its subversive message and focus on walking around a city sweet-talking and intimidating other people to get them to do what you want. But, of course, there's nothing new under the sun in the world of videogames, and it's now almost two decades since the invention of a game that did practically everything *Republic* does, but without the massively bloated and entirely unnecessary 3D graphics or absurd system spec. *The Rat* is, to the best of Emu Zone's knowledge, the only game

ever written about piracy from the pirate's perspective. (Of course, 1984 was a more innocent time when piracy was a harmless playground pastime, rather than the industry-destroying monster it so obviously is now.)

Playing the part of a schoolboy pirate, your goal is to obtain copies of every game in circulation, by both fair means and foul (getting a job to buy games, stealing them from shops, cracking and copying them, or bullying the game's cast of characters into swapping in order to build your collection). Like *Republic*, it's all about

resource-management but with a personal twist (for example, you can spend your money on going to a gym so you'll be better at beating people up to get them to give you stuff), and unlike *Republic* you don't need to spend £300 upgrading your PC in order to play it. *The Rat* – why pay more?

LINKS

dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/estate/dh69/wos/world/scorpion/scorpion.htm
– Yes, OK, Emu Zone wrote *The Rat* itself...
www.spectaculator.com
– RX Spectrum emulator

WHAT IS EMULATION?



By installing an emulator, you can run games that were programmed for different platforms – such as coin-ops – in their original form. The games come in the form of a ROM (Read Only Memory) that you load into the emulator to run. There are legal issues though, and unless you own the original game it's often against the law to download a ROM. For that reason, we can't give you links to ROMs, though we can give you links to the emulators themselves.



Even the title-screen graphics were pirated.



Limitless possibilities for naughtiness. Well, seven anyway.

PAYING THE PRICE

**SPECIAL
REPORT**

LOST TOYS, COMPUTER ARTWORKS, SILICON DREAMS – UK DEV STUDIOS ARE DROPPING LIKE FLIES. COULD THE GROWING COST OF DEVELOPMENT BE SLOWLY SUFFOCATING THE UK GAMES INDUSTRY? PAVEL BARTER INVESTIGATES...

MONEY? IT'S a drag.

When faced with the price tag on new releases, we PC gamers find ourselves whingeing like pensioners at a bus stop. But bear a thought for independent developers, who are forced to explore every means – short of

robbing Vegas casinos – to raise the mega budgets required for sculpting their digital delights.

In 2003, game development costs an arm and a leg, a torso and a national deficit, and it's getting increasingly hard to pay the bills. In the last two months alone we've seen the closure of no less than six UK development houses, namely Lost Toys, Attention To Detail, Silicon Dreams, VIS Isle of Wight, VIS London and, most recently, *The Thing* creators Computer Artworks. At London's recent Games Developers Conference, British game svengalis were all doom and gloom when it came to the future viability of their industry. "We have maybe 500 small development studios

at the moment. We could have just 50 in two years' time," said Jez San, chief executive of Argonaut Games.

Lionhead's managing director, Peter Molyneux, was equally grim: "You are going to see less of the creative, out-there ideas that turn into compulsive properties later on."

The problem is, games just keep on getting bigger and more sophisticated. Big publishers like EA have vast internal teams and huge financial resources to draw on, and running a small creative team is increasingly untenable.

IN A RICH MAN'S WORLD

In the early '90s, the average title would cost £200,000 to develop; towards the end of the decade, budgets began to exceed £1 million. Today, development teams are often 20 to 30 people strong, including top sound engineers and Hollywood animators. A single game can take more than two years to develop and cost over £6 million. How on earth can a start-up company with moths in its wallet dredge up this kind of cash?

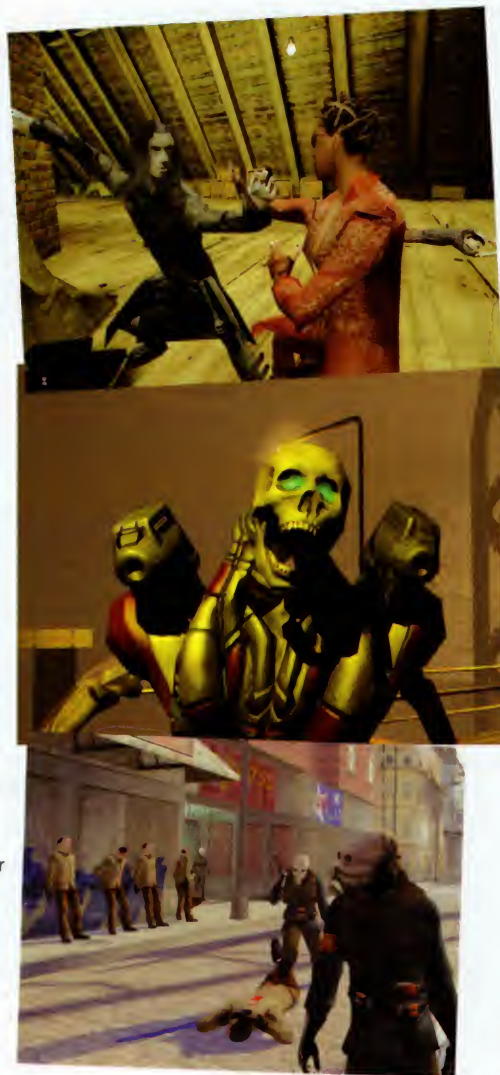
"This is a very serious issue for the development community in the

to release details about cancelled games. When it comes to the woes of private developers, we're usually left in the dark. But according to Nicholas Lovell, a financial consultant to the games industry, developers who work on single projects are particularly at risk: "Because games are becoming more expensive, publishers are investing less and instead of waiting for the existing ones to finish production, they are cancelling titles. Smaller games companies tend to be running one or two projects at an average price of between \$3m (£1.9m) and \$5m (£3.1m). That's a substantial amount of money, but it's only from two projects and should one of those be cancelled then the company is in serious trouble. With five or six projects on the go, a developer can cross-collateralise resources and risks."

ENTER ACCOUNTANT

That games are becoming more expensive is of little doubt. Including the corporate acquisition of Shiny, the rights for future games, and an hour of exclusive footage, *Enter The Matrix* was rumoured to have cost anything between £25m and £50m. "To keep pushing the limits not only takes more people, but better people," says Shiny's president Dave Perry.

Based in Oxford, Rebellion began as a two-person outfit consisting of brothers Jason and Chris Kingsley



A decade ago, a game would cost around £200,000 to develop. Today you won't find any change out of £6 million.

"The most worrying aspect is that it's extremely hard to apportion blame or point to a quick-fix solution"

working from the basement in their student house. "The two of us could easily create a game demo and impress the publishers, who in turn would be able to stump up £40,000 or less for the full game," recalls Jason. "We created *Murder for US Gold* on the Commodore 64 and we were paid a few tens of thousand pounds. I remember *Blade Warrior* on the Amiga had a budget of £60,000 with around six people working on it for a year." Rebellion is now a 110-strong company of programmers,

producers, artists, animators, designers, publishers and filmmakers, crafting titles like *Sniper Elite* and, most recently, *Judge Dredd: Dredd Vs. Death*.

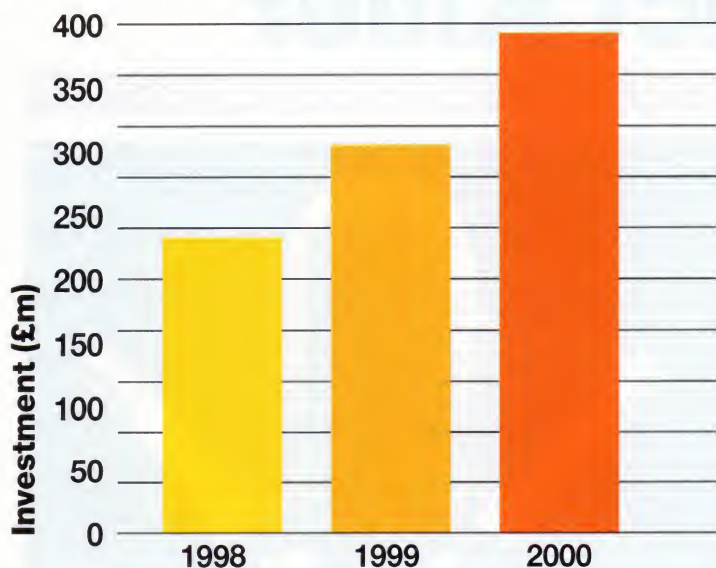
The sheer scale of projects in 2003 has changed the nature of development, claims Jason. "When we started," he reveals, "the funding model was basically the same as it is today, but now the numbers are several orders of magnitude bigger. Time scales for a finished game are twice as long, and team sizes have multiplied by at least 20 times."

UK," admits Roger Bennett, director general of industry group ELSPA.

Even seemingly healthy developers are nursing wounds, having been stung by the brunt of rising costs. After announcing post-tax losses of almost half a million earlier this year, Kuju has parted ways with Microsoft, handing a half-finished *Train Simulator 2* back to Bill's corporation. Kuju is a public company, so it is required



UK Games Development Investment



A survey conducted by Screen Digest in 2001 proves investment is increasing, but is there enough cash coming in to sustain continued growth?

Andrew Wilson, producer of EA Sports' *Rugby 2004*, concurs that the 'garage' production of games has all but disappeared. "Twenty years ago it was relatively easy to make independent films, but now consumers expect bigger and better products that require more time and money. It's exactly the same with games – budgets are getting bigger every year. Right now it's not unusual for a game to cost \$10m [£6m] to develop – give it a few years and they'll cost between \$20m [£12m] and \$40m [£24m]."

One answer to developers' financial conundrums is consolidation. By combining strengths, they diminish their liabilities. True, there's a risk that creativity will give way to corporate callousness, but it's a better option for developers than spending the rest of their careers asking, "Would you like fries with that?"

Not that a multi-tasking approach helped the midlands-based development group Kaboom Studios, which went into receivership in September. Two of the group's studios – Attention To Detail (*Salt Lake 2002*, *Drome Racers*) and Silicon Dreams (*UEFA Champions League Season 2001/2002*, *Lego Football Mania*) – folded, while Pivotal Games, creator of the *Conflict: Desert Storm* series, has been bought by publisher SCI.

Another response to rising development costs has been increasing cross-format releases. While *Half-Life 2* and *Doom 3* are both reaching desktops before console gamers get their grubby paws on them, many releases now land on every platform simultaneously.

BIG MONEY

"I believe the opportunity for bedroom coders of PC games has disappeared," concludes Nicholas Lovell. "The new creativity will be in mobile. Initially it's old creativity, with companies like Elite porting '80s hits like *Paperboy* and *Moon*

Buggy to Java. Maybe that will breed the new generation of Peter Molyneuxs and Jez Sans."

However, Mike McCart, community relations manager at Ensemble Studios (*Age Of Mythology*), believes there will still be room for smaller developers in the future. "I would urge them to work on smaller games with broad appeal that can be sold relatively inexpensively and grow in popularity by word-of-mouth advertising. It will be a lot easier to compete with games such as *Rollercoaster Tycoon* than it will be with RTS games made by Blizzard, EA and ourselves, or a first-person shooter from Valve, id, and Epic."

The most worrying aspect of the whole conundrum is that it's extremely hard to apportion blame or point to a quick-fix solution. In the free market small fish are inevitably squeezed out of the bowl, along with creativity and innovation. It's an economic reality but one that could potentially have a devastating effect on the gaming landscape. [E]



THEIR FINEST HOUR

EXCLUSIVE! OLEG MADDOX TALKS TO PC ZONE ABOUT *THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN*

THE CREATOR OF superb flight sim *IL-2 Sturmovik*, Oleg Maddox, has announced news of his next major project entitled *The Battle Of Britain*. The new WWII-themed sim takes place in 1940 and will allow you to take to the skies in various authentic aircraft from the British, German and Italian air forces.

"All the obvious ones will be there and a few of the more eccentric aircraft," revealed Maddox, exclusively to PC ZONE. "They'll perform in battle the way their historical counterparts did, so for example the Spitfire will be a good all-rounder, whereas the Messerschmitt BF-109E will dominate in the southern skies but lack the fuel to maintain a sustained fight nearer London."

The Battle Of Britain will considerably improve the graphics from *IL-2*, increasing the detail of the air and ground models and also adding better physical modelling, weather effects, sky and land environments. "We're also using a revolutionary new AI engine that scales

the AI in real-time depending on their distance from the player and impact on the game. This way we will be able to model raids by hundreds of aircraft while still retaining and improving upon the complex AI routines found in *IL-2*."

Oleg Maddox also took the opportunity to mention that an expansion pack for *IL-2: Forgotten Battles* is also planned for release in early 2004. More news on both these titles in a future PC ZONE.

■ **Publisher:** Ubisoft
 ■ **Developer:** 1C: Maddox Games
 ■ **ETA:** 2005
 ■ **Website:** www.il2sturmovik.com



The new planes look perfect, even running in the old *IL-2* engine.



Oleg Maddox is single-handedly keeping the flight genre exciting.



Tim Ansell

Founder, owner and MD of
The Creative Assembly Ltd

DEVELOPERS' QUESTION TIME

What PC games are you playing at the moment?

Rome: Total War. Nothing else quite does it for me at the moment.

What was the last videogame you finished?

Onimusha 2

What is your favourite game of all time?

Mario Kart 64. Never, ever get tired of it. Never.

What are you most proud of in your career?

Being the first person in the world to get a computer game as a central feature in a mainstream, primetime TV show (the new *Total War* engine in *TimeCommanders* on BBC2).

Who do you most admire in the industry and why?

Larry Goldberg, EVP Worldwide Studios at Activision. Might sound like the world's greatest suck up to your publisher, but the fact is he stuck his neck out and backed The Creative Assembly and our *Total War* franchise, whereas some others lacked the vision of its potential. He backed it with large amounts of cash. He took a risk in a very risk-averse business. I'm very proud to be able to repay that faith by delivering *Rome: Total War* next year. It's a stunner.

What has the PC contributed most to videogaming?

Network play. It's blazed the trail for the console market.

What is your company's philosophy? Do the impossible.

What's the best thing about your job?

The fact that, unlike any other part of the entertainment industry I'm aware of, good work results in commercial success.

What's the worst thing about your job? Stress.

What are you working on at the moment?

Rome: Total War. A top-secret console title. More television ventures both sides of the Atlantic.

What's the Next Big Thing in PC gaming?

Stupid question! *Rome: Total War* of course. It will change the face of RTS gaming forever. And I don't care in the slightest if that sounds like utter bollocks of the regular marketing variety because it's totally true and time will reveal it so.

Contract Killer

NEW HITMAN: CONTRACTS SET TO MAKE ASSASSINATION AN ART FORM

THE BALD-HEADED murderers among you will be overjoyed to hear that the third entry in the *Hitman* series is set to be released in the Spring of next year – and to celebrate Eidos has released this snazzy piece of artwork shown here.

Hitman: Contracts promises to provide a greater variety of ways to make a kill and a bucket-load of new firearms and close-combat weapons. More responsive controls and a more gradual learning curve are also set to feature, while all your assassinations will be made all the more beautiful by a flash new graphics engine.

This time round, Agent 47 finds himself in Paris; wounded, trapped and in mortal danger from men with guns (essentially another day at the office for the bald nutjob then).

From the title, *ZONE* is guessing that the goody-two-shoes kill-the-terrorist plot that ruined *Hitman 2* has been replaced by something darker and, well, a lot more like being a real *Hitman*. Here's hoping anyway.

- Publisher: Eidos
- Developer: Io Interactive
- ETA: Q1 2004



Duncan Goodhew had had enough.

LACTOSE LEGEND

MEET THE THE KNIGHTS WHO SAY 'GUTENTAG' IN KOCH'S KNIGHTSHIFT

TAKING THE piss out of German comedy has never been big or clever, but when German developer Reality Pump promises a fantasy RTS-come-RPG with lashings of Python-esque humour and resource management based entirely on the manufacture of milk, even the most politically correct of us begin to smirk.

Knightshift is certainly an interesting proposition. Its RTS section covers three story-driven campaigns in which you milk cows, pay for building construction with the aforementioned cow-juice and recruit different units for battle. The skimishes themselves are generally against ugly monsters, the bones of the

walking dead and the forces of evil. Whether or not they have their own 'evil' cows is yet to be confirmed.

Alongside the RTS campaigns lies an extensive role-play section in which you and several hardy companions hack and slash your way across the amusing fantasy land of cows, witches and 'terrifying mother-in-laws'. Beyond this is all the stuff you'd expect: heroism, imprisoned princesses, character classes, milk, stamina points, more milk and general weirdy-beardiness.

In fact, to quote the PR blurb: "When *Knightshift* has MILKED the genre, fantasy gaming will never be quite the same again." Quite.



RTS, RPG or a cunning mixture?

- Publisher: Koch Media
- Developer: Reality Pump
- ETA: Q1 2004
- Website: www.knightshift.com



Some German giant cows. Yesterday.



Bah! It's just a flesh wound.

*The conspirators have
heavily armed death squads.*

You have to expose them.

Out in November

Jade's world is under attack from an alien force. Her government claims to be defending the people, yet more and more of them are becoming enslaved. Fighting oppression, propaganda and deception, not to mention fighting those intent on killing her, Jade's journalistic quest is to unravel the truth and expose the conspiracy. What lies beyond good and evil? You are about to find out...



PC CD-ROM

PlayStation 2



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GOOD & EVIL**

www.beyondgoodevil.com/uk



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Microsoft

Your keyboard and mouse are easily connected

yet wonderfully free



So there's no cable to clutter your desktop!



Reinvented Wheel – NEW Tilt Wheel Technology on both the optical mouse and the keyboard lets you scroll vertically and now side-to-side, smoother and faster than ever!



Longer Battery Life – Experience clutter free, longer lasting wireless performance of six months or more*



Useful New Hot Keys – Launch your favourite websites and digital content from one touch programmable hot keys while enhanced F-keys help you perform common tasks.



Comfort Features – The innovative design with wider keys and softer edges, plus the cushioned black leather 'feel' palm rest deliver new levels of comfort.

The **Microsoft® Wireless Optical Desktop Elite** – distinctive innovation for the desktop!

To find out more visit www.microsoft.com/uk/hardware

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*Many users average more than six months battery life. Energizer batteries recommended.



Either someone's doing a jump or this track needs widening...

Kiss My Asphalt

STUNTS, JUMPS AND SLIDES – ITALIAN DRIVING SKILLS FEATURE IN MILESTONE'S *FX RACING*

ITALIAN DEVELOPER Milestone, who appeared back in issue 134 announcing its *Grand Prix Simulator* title, has revealed a new project. *FX Racing* is an arcade-style driving game with 18 tracks set in a neon-lit Tokyo, a Gothic Transylvania and a sand-swept Egypt.

Realism has been thrown out of the passenger seat window, so players will be able to pull off ridiculous power slides, massive jumps and two-wheel stunts in

one of 30 vehicles. Each trick earns you weapons, such as a fireball, which you can use in online multiplayer competitions.

We'll have the playable demo very soon, so you'll be able to check out *FX Racing* in its glory for yourself.

Publisher: TBC
Developer: Milestone
ETA: Q1 2004
Website: www.lincolnbeasley.co.uk

The Return of the Sensational ZONE Christmas Card Competition

SEND US A CHRISTMAS CARD AND WIN HOT GIFTS FOR YOUR CHRIMBO STOCKING

WE GET LONELY in the *ZONE* office, but never more so than at Christmas time. Occasionally we press our noses to the frosted windows of our offices and gaze sadly down at the kids pulling their parents towards Woolworths, or the pensioners sliding uncontrollably on the black ice towards the oncoming No 7 bus.

You can make a difference to our lives. Make, buy, steal or recycle a card and send it to the address below. We'll stick them on our walls, which will make us feel all gooey inside, and pick the three winners and three runners-up for each of the following categories:

TACKIEST CARD

Winner: A Force Feedback Steering Wheel, the Christmas number one game and a subscription to *PC ZONE*.
Runner-up: The tackiest gift we can muster up from the *ZONE* cupboards.

MOST OFFENSIVE CARD

Winner: A Force Feedback Steering Wheel, the Christmas number one game

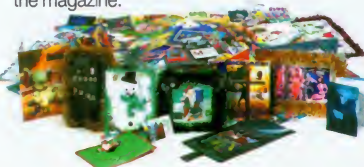
and a subscription to *PC ZONE*.
Runner-up: The most offensive gift we can lay our hands on.

BEST OVERALL CARD

Winner: A snazzy new DirectX 9 graphics card, the Christmas number one game and a subscription to *PC ZONE*.
Runner-up: A cool *Judge Dredd: Dredd Vs Death* figure, the Christmas number one game and a subscription to *PC ZONE*.

Send your cards to:
 Christmas Card Compo
PC ZONE
 Dennis Publishing
 9 Dallington Street
 London EC1V 0BQ

Closing date: December 19, 2003
 For general competition terms and conditions, see page seven of the magazine.



KOTOR – THE DIRECTOR'S CUT

BIOWARE SHOWS OFF NEW FEATURES FOR KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC ON PC

KNIGHTS OF THE *Old Republic* is currently the biggest-selling Xbox game, and deservedly so. Unlike *Halo* however (another Xbox 'exclusive' that was originally designed for PC), the wait for the PC interpretation has been mercifully short. In fact, we can guarantee (yes, guarantee) a full and thorough review next issue.

In the meantime, BioWare has finally revealed the list of new features for the PC version and they extend far beyond a mouse-driven interface and obligatory high-resolution textures.

James Ohlen, the game's leading architect, arrived in the country with the latest code and gleefully took us through an entirely new space station (orbiting Yavin 4, no less), a place offering its own specific side-quests, characters and new items. "KOTOR was developed originally

as a PC game so we wanted to add some extras to make up for the delay," he said. "All the original team have been back working on this version and we've even had to extend the team to add the new features – including a new lightsaber crystal. There are now in excess of a 1,000 player items in-game."

With *KOTOR* commanding pole position in the US charts and sure to make in-roads into the PC hit parade, rumours have already been circulating as to a possible follow-up. Apparently LucasArts has already commissioned new developer Obsidian to craft the sequel – watch this space.

- **Publisher:** Activision
- **Developer:** BioWare
- **ETA:** November
- **Website:** www.swkotor.com



Graphics are more detailed on the PC and we reckon BioWare have snuck in a few added environmental animations.



In response to Xbox complaints, the number of player heads has been increased.

It's what you don't see that gives you the freedom to explore



So what you see is the revolution of the mouse!

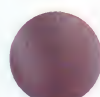
Reinvented Wheel – NEW Tilt Wheel Technology lets you scroll vertically and now side-to-side, smoother and faster than ever!



Longer Battery Life – Experience clutter free, longer lasting wireless performance of six months or more*



Stylish Design – Ergonomically shaped for comfort, 5 programmable buttons and a choice of textured black leather 'feel' or a variety of metallic finishes to suit your style.



Optical Technology – High performance Microsoft® Optical Technology for greater accuracy and control on virtually any surface.



The **Microsoft Wireless IntelliMouse® Explorer** – advanced innovation for the mouse!

To find out more visit www.microsoft.com/uk/hardware

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*Many users average more than six months battery life. Energizer batteries recommended.

THE MAN WHO KNOWS

MONKEYS HAVE LEARNED

to play a **computer game** using only their **minds**. The sinister experiment was carried out in **North Carolina, America** by the mysterious **Dr Miguel Nicolelis**, who three years ago forced monkeys to operate **robotic arms** with their **brains**. In his latest **meddling with nature**, Nicolelis and colleagues implanted microelectrodes into the brains of **Aurora** and **Ivy**, two female Rhesus Macaque monkeys. The simians were then taught to use a **joystick** to control the cursor of a rudimentary game that Nicolelis claimed they enjoyed playing. Once familiar with the game, they progressed to the **hands-free option**, and were able to continue via the power of **thought alone**. Nicolelis bragged: "There's certainly a great deal of science and engineering to be done to develop this technology and to create systems that can be used safely in humans. However, the results so far lead us to believe these brain-machine interfaces hold enormous promise for restoring function to paralysed people."

Surrounding your PC monitor with **household plants** can reduce the **ill-effects of gaming**, claims research in **Holland**. But research in **Japan** reckons that prolonged gaming can cause loss of concentration and stress due to reduced beta wave brain activity. However, a spokesperson for **Plants For People** claims: "Whilst the Japanese followed a study of the pre-frontal region of the brain governing emotion and creativity, the research from Holland has shown that being surrounded by plants reduces stress and boosts creativity. In short, we feel better around plants and they help improve our **butt-kicking performance!**"

The company that holds the rights to cult TV show **Blake's 7** has issued a **come-and-get-me plea** to game developers. **B7 Productions** is planning to revive the **dismal series**, and hopes this will spark interest within the games industry. **Exec Producer** Andrew Mark Sewell spat: "We're keen to work with people who understand we're not proposing a tongue-in-cheek tribute to an old show, but a **bold and exciting** interpretation of one of the most influential and popular science fiction shows ever produced in the UK." But what about **Blake's 7**?

"We feel better around plants and they help improve our butt-kicking performance!"



TOCA Goes Turbo

CODEMASTERS WARMS UP THE ENGINE FOR RACE DRIVER 2: THE ULTIMATE RACING SIMULATOR ON YOUR PC

THEY'VE DROPPED the TOCA prefix, but *Race Driver 2* is shaping up very nicely indeed. Keeping with the cinematic plot and basic role-playing aspects of its predecessor, the game is set to include a remarkable amount of features and game modes.

There will be 30 different global championships, as diverse as

Classic Cars, Street Racing, Rally, Formula Ford, V8 Supercars and Open Wheel Grand Prix. Within this you'll also get 56 racing circuits from all over the world, together with 35 of the fastest and most powerful (and shiny) racing beasts on the planet.

With revamped physics, a new deformation damage system and a

vast catalogue of visual tinkering, *Race Driver 2* will blast onto your monitors sometime next Spring. And with that amount of tricks up its sleeve, we can't wait.

- Publisher: Codemasters
- Developer: Codemasters
- ETA: Q1 2004
- Website: www.codemasters.com



The perils of leaving the pit lane too early.



Fast cars, skilled drivers and tilted cameras.

I will say this only once

SHOOT AND SUBVERT THE NAZI WAR EFFORT IN SABOTAGE 1943



WW2 GAMES ARE

ten-a-penny these days, but Replay Studios' *Sabotage 1943* is looking more interesting than most. We recently had a chance to check out the game and were rather taken by the dynamic light effects and sinister-looking shadows.

The game itself takes place in Nazi-occupied France, with you controlling one of seven different resistance operatives pretending to be harmless civilians while carrying out various spying and saboteur missions.

Boasting some impressive particle effects and interesting game features (such as looking through keyholes, playing dead, interrogating enemy soldiers and stealing uniforms), the game is certainly one to watch. Check out the website for more info.

- Publisher: TBA
- Developer: Replay Studios
- ETA: TBA
- Website: www.sabotage1943.com



The light and shadow effects are looking pretty snazzy.

COMPETITION

XPLOSIV®

WIN MORE GAMES THAN YOU'LL EVER BE ABLE TO PLAY. WHO NEEDS CHRISTMAS?

HAVE AN XPLOSIV XMAS WITH A GREAT BIG HAMPER STUFFED FULL OF BRILLIANT GAMES

DO YOU EVER get the feeling there are more holes in your games collection than stars in the sky? Waiting for classics to get re-released as budget offerings is a brilliant way of plugging the gaps, and Xplosiv is one of the UK's leading budget labels, as you can see from the games it released in 2003.

But not content with making life easier on your wallet, Xplosiv has given us a hamper containing every single 2003 release. And as it's nearly Christmas and we're feeling generous, we've decided to give it up to one of our lovely readers – and it could be you.

That's right, the lucky winner will walk away with every single game listed below, which should last you until it's time to slaughter the turkeys again, this time next year. Then you can give them all away to your mates as pressies. Five runners-up will receive the top seven games. To win, all you have to do is answer the following question, and send your answer to:

PC ZONE
Dennis Publishing
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QUESTION:

What is more Xplosiv?
A: TNT B: PMT C: CDUK

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See page 7 for details.

Forthcoming Releases

Tribes 2
Throne Of Darkness
Arcanum
Pearl Harbor:
Strike At Dawn
Shanghai Great Moments
3 Hoyle's
Hip Hop eJay 3

2003 Releases

Soldier Of Fortune:
Special Edition
Homeworld Cataclysm
SEGA GT
Silent Thunder:
A-10 Tank Killer 2
Cyberstorm 2:
Corporate Wars
Edgar Torronteras'
Extreme Biker
The House Of The Dead 2
Crazy Taxi
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3
Gabriel Knight 3
Hexen II
Shanghai Second Dynasty
Ultra 3D Pinball Thrillride
SEGA Bass/Marine Fishing Double Pack
Warrior Kings Remastered
Dance 3
Venture Tycoon

Age Of Empires: Gold Edition
Heretic II
Sin
Aliens Vs Predator: Gold Edition
No One Lives Forever:
Game Of The Year Edition
London Racer
Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX/Tony Hawk's
Pro Skater 2 Double Pack
Combat Flight Simulator/
Crimson Skies Double Pack
Zork Grand Inquisitor



Good Cop. Bad Cop

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF A MONTH ON PC ZONE

GOOD COP

A flood of awesome games, reaffirming our faith in the greatness of PC gaming. Where to start? *Max Payne 2*, *Call Of Duty*, *Prince Of Persia*, *Hidden & Dangerous 2*...



Lovely shiny new offices, conveniently placed greasy spoon, shiny wooden floors and natural sunlight. Esplendido!

Suzy Wallace. The disc editor with a mouth like the Dartford Tunnel but a heart of gold.

Pro Evo 3? On the PC? Is this some kind of beautiful dream?

BAD COP

Nightmare journey times to our new Barbican pad, and the Tube's decision to hit meltdown the day after we moved in.



Will Porter finding out that two years ago his Brixton flat was a notorious crack-den and, mere days later, traumatically losing his favourite QPR mug in the depths of Dennis Publishing HQ.

Dave Woods coming down with a terrible mystery illness. Which was strange, as he seemed fine when he was spotted snorting Sambucas the night before.

UT2004 slipping to next year, totally screwing up our carefully made plans.

Good Cop: **Brain**. Bad Cop: **Inspector Gadget**. From Inspector Gadget – suggested by Linus Albright, Wakefield. Send in your ideas for next month's Good Cop and Bad Cop to win a PC ZONE goodie bag!

NAMCO FLIPS KILL.SWITCH

TOP NAMCO TITLES *EXTREME FORCE* AND *KILL.SWITCH* BOUND FOR PC

FROM PAC-MAN to *Mr Driller*, Namco has always been one of our favourite Japanese developers. Which is why it comes as good news to hear it's committing strongly to the PC platform, with two new triple-A action titles headed our way next year. Through a deal with French publisher LSP, we'll be treated to the delights of *kill.switch*, a third-person action/adventure based on tactical military action, and *Extreme Force: Grant City*

Anti-Crime, a likewise third-person shooter based on SWAT-style crime busting. This news follows the earlier announcement that Namco's bullet-time riddled *Dead To Rights* would appear on PC in time for Christmas, though it's yet to appear at the time of press.

Of the two new titles, we're particularly keen to get our hands on *kill.switch*, which looks set to offer a host of cool new additions to the genre, including a flexible Offensive

Cover System, which enables you to take cover behind all sorts of environmental objects and still keep shooting. More on these good-looking titles soon.

■ Publisher: LSP
■ Developer: Namco
■ ETA: 2004
■ Website: www.namco.com



Extreme force. Dead To Rights spin-off.



An indoor trellis. How very feng shui.



kill.switch: lots of shooting round corners.

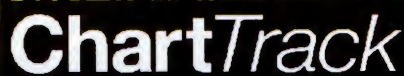


All evil switches must die.

CHARTS

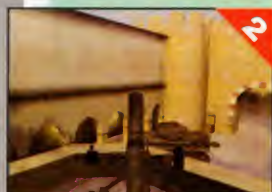
In association with **VIRGIN MEGASTORES**

Your one-stop guide to game releases past, present and future. Whether a game is lost, looming or selling like sim-cakes, this is where you'll find it



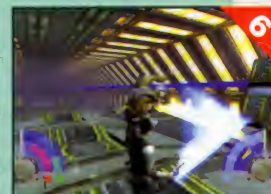


Two years ago, a game was cruelly snatched from the PC cradle and paraded in front of some console-owning ruffians. Now the prodigal son has returned and, despite the graphics looking slightly dated, *Halo* is still a great game and fully deserving of the top spot.



The long wait for *Call Of Duty* is almost over, but EA have proved that there's still a little juice left in the old *Allied Assault* warhorse. As a mission pack we've seen better, but as a stop-gap before the next batch of WWII shooters it fits the bill nicely.

	TITLE	PUBLISHER	SCORE
1	NEW HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED	MICROSOFT	84%
2	NEW MOH: ALLIED ASSAULT - BREAKTHROUGH	EA	77%
3	NEW C&C: GENERALS - ZERO HOUR	EA	83%
4	▼ CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4	EIDOS	90%
5	NEW AGE OF MYTHOLOGY: THE TITANS	MICROSOFT	85%
6	NEW JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY	ACTIVISION	89%
7	▼ THE SIMS: SUPERSTAR	EA	59%
8	▼ MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR	ACTIVISION	90%
9	NEW HOMEWORLD 2	VU GAMES	81%
10	NEW TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2004	EA	81%



It may not be a major technical advance on *Jedi Outcast*, but *Jedi Academy* still has the old *Star Wars* magic. With extra emphasis on Force Powers and saber combat, and the chance of turning to the Dark Side, it's a game that certainly has us in its (Force) grip.



Only one *Sims* expansion pack in the top ten? Are they finally on the slide? Nope. Everyone should just take a deep breath and enjoy the *Sims*-free silence until the sequel arrives. Or the budget release. Or the special compilation pack with shiny *Sim*-knobs on.

YOUR SHOUT

Have your say at www.pczone.co.uk

I thought that every man, woman, child and cat would own a copy of *Halo* by now. What's that you say? It was on Xbox? Oh, that explains it.
Carpet_2001

I'm surprised *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004* only scraped in at number 10. A licence like that mixed together with a - 'shock!' - good game, you'd think that it would have done a little better.
JoeyJoJoJnr

And to think *Half-Life 2* could've been sitting at the top right now if it weren't for the bloody Germans. "shakes fist" *Championship Manager* is an anagram of "Shh, I'm Peg - a porn maniac." The public needs to know!
Escaped_Monkey



TOP 10

COMPETITION



1. HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED	MICROSOFT
2. JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY	ACTIVISION
3. C&C: GENERALS - ZERO HOUR	EA
4. SIM CITY 4: RUSH HOUR	EA
5. TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2004	EA
6. TOMB RAIDER: THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS	EIDOS
7. THE SIMS: DOUBLE DELUXE	EA
8. ENTER THE MATRIX	ATARI
9. MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT DELUXE	EA
10. RUGBY 2004	EA

Win the entire Virgin Top 10!

Once again, **PC ZONE** and Virgin have teamed up to give you the chance to win every game in the current Virgin Top 10 (see left, and try not to drool). All you have to do to enter is answer the following:

QUESTION: Which Scottish band had a hit with the song *Halo* back in 1997?

Send your answers on the back of a postcard to:

PC ZONE Chart Compo Issue 136, Dennis Publishing, 9 Dallington Street, London, EC1V 0BQ. Closing date: December 13, 2003

- Please include your name, address, daytime phone number, email address, job title and company name (and age if under 18).
- Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers or new products from other companies.
- Please indicate whether you are a current subscriber to **PC ZONE**.

For general competition terms and conditions, turn to page 7.

INCOMING!

PC ZONE'S RELEASE SCHEDULE FOR THE NEXT FEW MONTHS. ALL APPROXIMATE MONTHLY DATES ARE CORRECT AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRESS

NOVEMBER

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL	UBISOFT
BROKEN SWORD: THE SLEEPING DRAGON	THQ
CALL OF DUTY	ACTIVISION
CHICAGO 1930	KOCH MEDIA
CIVILIZATION III: CONQUESTS	ATARI
CONTRACT JACK	VU GAMES
DUNGEON SIEGE: LEGENDS OF ARANNA	MICROSOFT
FIFA FOOTBALL 2004	EA
HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2	GATHERING
HORIZONS: EMPIRE OF ISTARIA	ATARI
KNIGHTS OF THE TEMPLE	TDK
LOTR: THE RETURN OF THE KING	EA
MAGIC THE GATHERING: BATTLEFIELDS	ATARI
NBA LIVE 2004	EA
NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND	EA
NEVERWINTER NIGHTS: HORDES OF THE UNDERDARK	ATARI
POP IDOL	CODEMASTERS
SECRET WEAPONS OVER NORMANDY	ACTIVISION
SINBAD: LEGEND OF THE SEVEN SEAS	ATARI
SOLDNER - SECRET WARS	BIG BEN
SPLINTER CELL: COLLECTOR'S EDITION	UBISOFT
STAR WARS GALAXIES: AN EMPIRE DIVIDED	ACTIVISION
STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC	ACTIVISION
TERMINATOR 3: WAR OF THE MACHINES	ATARI
TOM CLANCY'S RAVEN SHIELD: ATHENA SWORD	UBISOFT
TOTAL CLUB MANAGER 2004	EA
URU: AGES BEYOND MYST	UBISOFT
WARLORDS IV: HEROES OF ETHERIA	UBISOFT
WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP POOL 2004	JALECO
XIII	UBISOFT

DECEMBER

ALPHA BLACK ZERO: INTREPID PROTOCOL	PLAYLOGIC
APOCALYPTICA	KONAMI
COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WAR	CDV
GROUND CONTROL 2: OPERATION EXODUS	VU GAMES
HARRY POTTER: QUIDDITCH WORLD CUP	EA
LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE	EIDOS
LOCK ON: MODERN AIR COMBAT	UBISOFT
LORDS OF EVERQUEST	UBISOFT
PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME	UBISOFT
PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3	KONAMI
WAR OF THE RING	VU GAMES

Q1 2004

ARMED & DANGEROUS	ACTIVISION
DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR	EIDOS
DRAKE	VU GAMES
FAR CRY	UBISOFT
HALF-LIFE 2	VALVE
LORDS OF THE REALM III	VU GAMES
PAINKILLER	DREAMCATCHER
SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW	UBISOFT
UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004	ATARI
X2: THE THREAT	KOCH MEDIA

2004

ADVENT RISING	VU GAMES
AGAINST ROME	BIGBEN
AXIS & ALLIES	ATARI
BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM	EA
BLACK & WHITE 2	EA
BLACK9	VU GAMES
BLOWOUT	VU GAMES
DELTA FORCE - BLACK HAWK DOWN: TEAM SABRE	NOVALOGIC
DOOM 3	ACTIVISION
DRAGON EMPIRES	CODEMASTERS
DRIVER 3	ATARI
EVERQUEST II	UBISOFT
JOINT OPERATIONS	NOVALOGIC
MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT	EA
RICHARD BURNS RALLY	SCI
ROME: TOTAL WAR	ACTIVISION
SAM & MAX: FREELANCE POLICE	ACTIVISION
SID MEIER'S PIRATES	ATARI
THE MATRIX ONLINE	UBISOFT
THE MOVIES	ACTIVISION
THE SIMS 2	EA
TRIBES: VENGEANCE	VU GAMES
TRINITY	ACTIVISION
VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE - BLOODLINES	ACTIVISION
WORLD OF WARCRAFT	VU GAMES

MISSING IN ACTION

The war's not over until the last game comes home...

X2: THE THREAT

EPIC SPACE odyssey X2 continues to evade our touch as it slips back to next February. The lush rolling demo suggests that if there was ever a game to topple *Elite* then this is it, but for now you'll have to settle for looking and not touching.

- Publisher: Koch Media
- Developer: Egosoft
- ETA: February 6
- Website: www.x2thethreat.com



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004



MR ATARI gave us a call the other day and told us that his forthcoming frag-fest won't be appearing on a monitor near you until early next year. To compensate we've made some Bioguns out of papier-mâché and run around the office everyday saying, 'Glob, glob, glob,' but quite frankly it isn't the same.

- Publisher: Atari
- Developer: Digital Extremes
- ETA: January
- Website: www.atari.com

FAR CRY

READY FOR another kick in the nadsgers? Ubisoft's glorious-looking shooter won't be out until next year, with Crytek's staff needing more time to attach all the necessary bells and whistles. You won't be running around an island paradise with a gun for a while yet.

- Publisher: Ubisoft
- Developer: Crytek
- ETA: 2004
- Website: www.farcry-thegame.com



US TOP 10

1. HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED	MICROSOFT
2. C&C: GENERALS - ZERO HOUR	EA
3. MOH: ALLIED ASSAULT - BREAKTHROUGH	EA
4. JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY	ACTIVISION
5. THE TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL	ATARI
6. SIM CITY 4 DELUXE	EA
7. MS FLIGHT SIM 2004	MICROSOFT
8. AGE OF MYTHOLOGY	MICROSOFT
9. HOMEWORLD 2	VU GAMES
10. THE SIMS: DELUXE EDITION	EA

THE BEST • ~OF~ BRITISH

Welcome to the fourth outing in our UK-wide tour to seek out the cream of British games development. This month, our intrepid adventurer **Martin Korda** heads into deepest darkest...

NORTH LONDON



THE DEVELOPERS

ELIXIR STUDIOS

Currently working on: *Evil Genius*

SPORTS INTERACTIVE

Currently working on: *CM4: Season 03/04* and *Eastside Hockey Manager*

DEIBUS STUDIOS

Currently working on: A yet to be announced PC title

WELCOME TO North London.

Home of a rag-tag collection of the most toothless, dishevelled tube-station loitering inebriates in the land, side by side with spike-faced blue-lipped goths and pseudo-intellectual snobs clutching *Guardian* crosswords.

Welcome to North London, where the dreams of many a respectable man are washed away by a mouthful of cider, but the dreams of a small few touch the world in wonderful ways. Welcome to North London, home of three of the UK's most

successful games development companies – Elixir Studios (*Republic*), Sports Interactive (*Champ Man*) and Deibus (*Motocross Mania*). In our ongoing quest to uncover the very best that the UK games development scene has to offer, we've mounted a daring mission to visit all three studios in one short month. First stop: Camden tube.

ELIXIR STUDIOS

"In retrospect, maybe we should have tried something a little less ambitious. However, I think we've created a unique game in *Republic: The Revolution*. I hope we've learnt our lessons from it." Demis Hassabis, founder of Camden Town-based Elixir Studios, sits back and relaxes in the executive leather chair opposite me as he finishes his sentence, his youthful looks belying the years of games development experience he's

accumulated from nearly a decade in the biz. The very same Demis Hassabis, who was accused of being arrogant by certain sections of the press when he up and left Lionhead Studios a little over five years ago to realise his dream of setting up his own company and creating his own, hopefully groundbreaking games. There's a fine line between arrogance and self-belief, and with the recent success of *Republic*, Demis can finally begin to feel vindicated.

"I left Lionhead in February 1998. I'd been there eight months. *Black & White* was pretty much a sure thing, but back then when I started Elixir I thought I could take on the world," admits Demis. "Looking back, I don't know if I'd be that brave again."

The past five years have clearly offered Demis a few sobering experiences. To say the development of *Republic* was difficult

would be like saying George Best enjoys the odd glass of wine with lunch, and Demis has had to come to terms with the fact that talent and ambition aren't always enough in this game. Still, he's come out of it a wiser fellow, and has few regrets about his decisions.

"*Black & White* was going to take years, and originally Lionhead was only going to do one game at a time. I couldn't see how I'd ever get round to doing one of my own games," says Demis. "So I wrote a business plan and recruited a load of mates from university. Retrospectively, they were good coders, but had never done a game before."

BAD TIMES AND GOOD

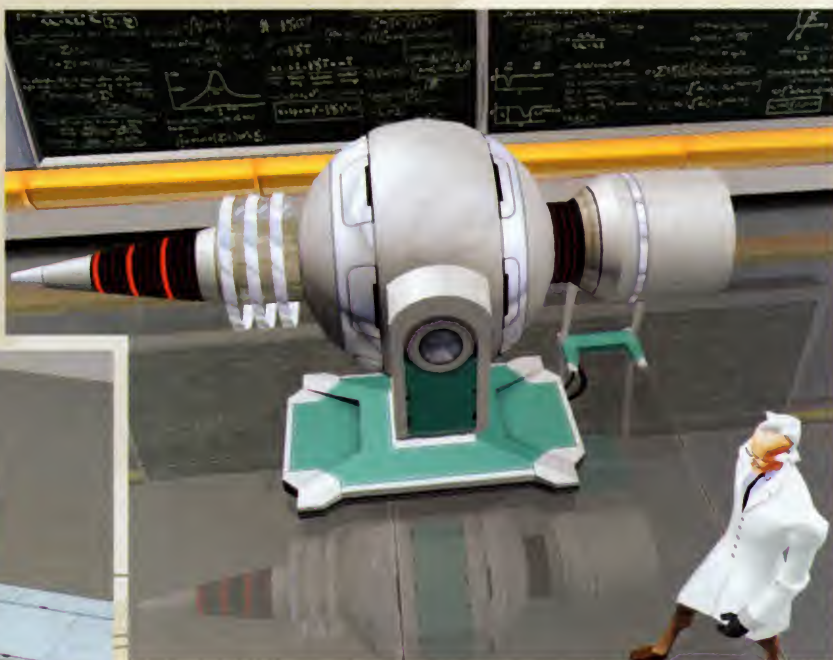
These stuttering beginnings proved a stumbling block for Demis and his fledgling company, setting *Republic* back a year before it even got going, as his team learnt their trade on the fly. "I didn't realise at the time just how ambitious a



Demis Hassabis



"Stop getting Bond wrong!"



The main goal of *Evil Genius* is to create a Doomsday device.



Seven-foot with the hair, three-foot-six without.

project *Republic* was. That probation cost us about a year, because we were learning as we went. Later in the development, I started hiring more experienced coders, which is what I should have done at the start."

Demis left Bullfrog in 1994 after two years of loyal service (to go to university), having cut his teeth under the watchful eye of development guru Peter Molyneux (founder of Lionhead) and alongside another rising star of the development world Jonty Barnes (head of Black & White Studios). When he re-entered the games business, Demis found a very different industry from the one he'd left. "The industry had changed hugely. I didn't realise how big projects were getting. The start of *Black & White* was only seven or eight people. So I started Elixir with this same mentality."

Despite the trials and tribulations of an increasingly unforgiving games

development world, Demis and his team won through, producing in *Republic* a game that was both intelligent and commercially viable. Perhaps not the vision Demis once envisaged, but still a strategy game that challenged the norm and injected a mostly turgid genre with a shot of originality.

NEW AND OLD

But how does the finished product compare with the original vision? "Originally I wanted to make you feel like you were Fidel Castro or Evita. I think we've got part of the way there, but not quite. There aren't big enough crowds, they don't react to you in a freeform enough way yet. I wanted great big parades with ticker tape and to pull the player into the visual world a little more than we have. It wouldn't be technically possible yet to do these things."

Technology aside, I asked Demis what other features he would have included, given the time: "I would have liked the AI to be a little more flexible, so we could have used the visual world more. I also always wanted it to be multiplayer. We even had a multiplayer version, but it never made it to release as we didn't have enough time to make it stable. Maybe we'll have time to revisit that as a patch or an add-on." Here's hoping.



Elixir: new games from a different angle.

EVIL CACKLING

As talk meandered away from *Republic*, we moved on to Elixir's latest project, *Evil Genius* (a tycoon-like strategy game), still a year off completion but, unlike *Republic*, bang on schedule. "One day, after I'd just watched a James Bond film, I suddenly thought it'd be cool to make a game where you're an evil genius who wants to take over the world and has to fight off secret agents."

The game will encourage you to play as said evil genius, as you attempt to create a Doomsday device with which to hold the world to ransom, while simultaneously fighting off 007 wannabes.

EVIL GENIUS

WE CAUGHT UP AND GRILLED *EVIL GENIUS* PRODUCER PETER GILBERT AND ASKED HIM A FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT HIS FORTHCOMING TYCOON STRATEGY GAME...

PCZ Can you tell us a bit about the gameplay?

PETER There are five major parts: base building, base defending, missions, research and training of henchmen and minions.

PCZ What's the difference between a minion and a henchman?

PETER Minions go through very specific training, such as military, scientific or social skills, while henchmen are trained less specifically.



PCZ What kind of missions can we expect to see in *Evil Genius*?

PETER Stealing priceless works of art, kidnapping people and training them up as your minions are just a couple. Basically you're sending out your minions to gather resources for your organisation.

PCZ Can you control your minions during missions?

PETER There is a high level of autonomy. But you do get feedback during their missions. So if a mission is going badly, you can choose to either withdraw or send more resources.

PCZ Do you ever see huge battles as you do at the end of James Bond movies?

PETER Yes, that's definitely on our wish list. The technology does allow us to do it. I think battles could be between 20 to 30 characters per side. There'll be a lot of preparation in setting up your defences, but once a battle kicks off, your henchmen will be totally autonomous.



"I didn't realise at the time just how ambitious *Republic* was... We were learning as we went"

DEMIS HASSABIS
FOUNDER OF ELIXIR STUDIOS



Republic's originality has been rewarded by strong early sales.

"We came up with the main concept over one weekend," said Demis. "I wanted to include *X-COM* away-team elements, where you send your men out to complete missions for you. In *Evil Genius*, you choose who to send and what equipment to give them. They then give you real-time feedback on their progress so you can make tactical decisions."

Demis is clearly excited about the project, believing it'll add some much-needed variety to the tycoon genre. Those of you who read this magazine regularly will be more than aware how many substandard, churned-out tycoon games are currently clogging up the shelves. *Evil Genius*, even at this stage, is looking like it'll seriously buck that trend.

"You also get to train up your henchmen, like in *Enter The Dragon*. So you can get all your henchmen training as kung fu masters," he continued enthusiastically, an enormous grin crossing his face. "You'll also be able to send your minions out on missions and the more missions you do, the more secret agents will come and attack you."

It was nearly time to finish, but before we bade our farewells, one... more... question: Any plans to do a *Republic 2*?

"I have some ideas for it," he revealed. "I wouldn't mind setting it in Rome. But at the moment I'm still too close to *Republic*. I need to take a year or so before I can look at the game with more critical eyes and give it a whole revision."

Given his candid and honest self-assessment of his company and first project, arrogant is the last word you could use to describe Demis. Forthcoming? Yes. Visionary? Definitely. Modest? Most certainly. Arrogant? Not a chance. Interview over. Case closed.

SPORTS INTERACTIVE

And so we move on to the second of North London's three top PC games development companies, a name that will be familiar to many a sleep-deprived football fan: Sports Interactive, creators of the legendary *Championship Manager*. Located at Angel, Islington, an area that is anything but heavenly, the company's offices boasting more locks and chains than a specialist bondage shop.

On a drizzly morning, I met up with managing director Miles Jacobson, our interview monitored by an ever-watchful PR man, who sat like a coiled spring, waiting to jump should the conversation

stray on to a subject too sensitive. Given the subsequent split by Sports Interactive from their publisher Eidos a mere week after our interview, it's little wonder the two men were being so cautious.

But what will be the implications of this parting? For starters, it means that *CM4: Season 03/04* will be the last SI-developed *Champ Man* game, with Eidos retaining the licence. A minute's silence if you will...

Before you break down and cry though, relax. Eidos has kept the name and look of the game, and that's it. SI has retained the player database and game engine, so any future *Champ Man* games or updates will be running on a totally new engine developed by Eidos. Meanwhile, SI is currently planning the first of its new football management games, replete with a new name. The legend will live on.

UP ALL NIGHT, UP ALL DAY

As rain pounded against the window, I looked at Miles, his face lined with months of sleep deprivation from playtesting *CM4* to within an inch of his life. He admitted he'd been up till 4am guiding his team to a staggering run of form during the closing stages of the season, which saw them rocket from mid-table mediocrity to

FIVE THINGS YOU NEVER KNEW ABOUT... NORTH LONDON

- North London traffic moves at an average speed of 2.9mph during peak periods. Clearly, the congestion charge is working a treat.
- It's been reported that the middle classes are pushing the lower classes out of North London. Rumour has it that the council has proposed an extension of Camden Town tube station to make more room for pissed-up failed businessmen of every class.
- Latest reports show that North London schools are failing to live up to national standards. Several heads were asked to comment, but replied it was too early in the afternoon for them to get out of bed and speak to us.
- North London is a great advocate of equal opportunities in the workplace. At one stage, the Delbus team was made out of representatives of every continent and boasted every European language. However, rumours that the Welsh were banned are unconfirmed.
- A strange curse is said to exist in Angel. Despite the fact that there are scores of restaurants within 15 minutes walk of Sports Interactive's offices, none of them stay open for long after members of the team visit. Well, would you want to eat in a room full of unwashed, sweating men with bloodshot eyes? Gotta love those deadlines.

the first division playoff final against Nottingham Forest, only to see his team lose by a sickeningly narrow margin. "The laptop nearly went out the window," he grinned. "See we do play the game, we're all addicts here."

It's an all-too-familiar scenario for fans worldwide, and is the reason why over 15 years after the first *Championship Manager* game hit the shelves (it was originally called *European Champions* before Domark took a punt on the game and renamed it *CM*), it's still one of the most successful series in the world.

BUG HUNT

On release, *Championship Manager 4*'s list of bugs was immense, but with the fifth (and what SI hopes



Name	Position	Age	Form	Morale	Goals	Value
Marion Bigot	DM RC	27	Very Good	100%	10214	
Clarke Carlisle	D C	22	Very Good	100%	1900K	
Danny Shittu	D C	21	Very Good	100%	1138K	
Dennis Oll	F RC	19	Very Good	100%	1573K	
Marc Bircham	DM RC	24	Very Good	100%	1675K	
Karl Gormley	F C	12	Very Good	100%	1750K	
Jack Galloway	CB	24	Very Good	100%	1250K	
Gavin Dool	CB	24	Good	100%	1775K	
Karl Galloway	F C	26	Good	100%	1158K	
Richard Lanning	M C	22	Very Good	100%	1134K	
Steve Farnham	D-DM L	35	Superb	100%	1423K	
Gavin Farnham	AM C	24	Superb	100%	1215K	
Matthew Rose	Striker	26	Very Good	100%	1800K	
Andy Thomson	D C	31	Very Good	100%	1124K	
Terrill Forbes	D RC	20	Good	100%	1550K	
Gino Mauro Padula	D L	26	Very Good	100%	1275K	
Larry Griffiths	F RC	25	Good	100%	1124K	
Richard Pagnante	S C	20	Very Good	100%	1750K	
Danny Murphy	D L	18	Very Good	100%	1750K	
Oliver Burgess	M RC	21	Very Good	100%	1275K	
Marion Bean	DM C	18	Very Good	100%	1550K	
Douglas	F RC	21	Good	100%	1850K	

Every player's stats are compiled by an expert.

is the final) patch, the game is now virtually flawless. I asked Miles how much more time he would have liked before release. "Five years." An unexpected answer. "Then we could have got absolutely everything we wanted into the game," he continued. "I'd love to have accurately modelled pictures of each player, but there are so many problems with the image rights, and the game's so big it wouldn't be commercially viable."

It's this kind of dedication to perfection and realism that has propelled *Championship Manager* into a different league from any other sports management sim. Such is the fear it instills in all other management game developers that they never fail to assure us that their game isn't trying to compete with *Championship Manager 4*. How could it? *CM*'s been 17 years in the making.

"The series started in 1986 when Oliver and Paul [Collyer] were still at school. They lived on a farm and they didn't like any of the football management games around. When they finished the first working version, they were

encouraged to send it off to publishers. We've still got the rejection letters. But Domark really enjoyed it. And the rest, I suppose, is history."



Miles Jacobson

EVOLUTION

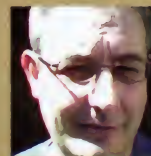
But after nearly two decades of success, during which time the series has constantly evolved – most recently incorporating a 2D match engine – where else is there left for *SI* to take their new batch of football management games? "Because the football world is always evolving, it means that our games are always evolving too," came Miles' practised reply.

JOB FOCUS – THE RESEARCH SCOUT

SI EMPLOYS OVER 2,500 PLAYER SCOUTS WORLDWIDE WHO TRAVEL TO WATCH EVERY TEAM IN *CM*'S PLAYER DATABASE TO ENSURE EACH ONE'S STATS ARE ACCURATE AND UP TO DATE

We chat to...

Ian Scholes, Sports Interactive's Norwich City researcher



I hope I can make educated assessments relative to other players in *CM*. I also try to check out the forums for second opinions.

PCZ How often do you watch a player?

IAN I've had a season ticket at Norwich City for over 14 years and have only missed a handful of home games. I also take in as many away games as I can.

PCZ What advice would you give to someone who wants to follow in your footsteps?

IAN Keep an eye on the *SI Games.com* website for opportunities. In the meantime, play the game lots so you can get an idea of what ratings fit players you know. If you get the job, try to be realistic. It's no good saying that some up-and-coming teenager is already better than Ronaldo (and that goes for Rooney too).

PCZ Tell us a bit about your job...

IAN I inform *SI* about player and staff comings and goings, contract renewals and ratings for each player. These are always going to be a bit subjective, if not controversial. We're asked to rate a player's abilities, eg pace, on a scale of one to 20. Each player is also given a Potential rating, which affects their potential to improve.

PCZ How do you formulate the stats for each player?

IAN After years of watching football,

I asked him what the chances were of taking the game into 3D? A shake of the head from the PR guy. Clearly a taboo subject. OK, I'll rephrase that. Would Miles like to see the game go into 3D? "Personally, I don't want it to. Whether other members of the team want to see it long term, I don't know. But if you'd asked me five years ago if I'd wanted a 2D engine, I would have said no."

So why is *SI* reluctant to go down that route? "We always strive for accuracy," explained Miles. "I don't think there's a 3D engine made so far that looks anything like football. I think we could do it, although it would probably take us ten years. If we were going to do a 3D engine in ten years time we'd be looking at starting it now, and we're not."

And there would be tactical problems too. With *Championship Manager* being all about man-management and micromanaging team tactics, a 3D engine could hinder the game just as much as it could enhance it. "I think the 2D engine gives you much more tactical information than a 3D one could, unless you were playing on a 50 inch monitor that lets you see the whole pitch in detail. It's essential to see it all because if a ball is played over your defence and your left back doesn't track the run of the man he's marking, you need to be able to see that. The only way of doing that is a top-down view."

EVERY CLOUD...

One of the main influences behind the 2D match engine was former Liverpool and



SI: head and shoulders above the competition.



CM4 is so detailed you can control any one of thousands of teams from across the world. Even Southport.

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

IN A TOUGH INDUSTRY YOU NEED TO KNOW HOW TO SURVIVE. DANIEL BOBROFF, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER AT DEIBUS, GIVES OUT SOME HANDY HINTS...

PCZ What do you think is a good size for a games development company and why?

DANIEL We think that the ideal size for a development team is around 30 to 40 people. Any more and we'd start to lose that creative spark needed to produce games that we want to produce. Instead you get an awful lot of politics.

PCZ What is the single most important attribute needed by a development



team in order to make quality games? **DANIEL** A creative edge is crucial. If you haven't got it, you can't compete against the publishers' internal studios. Why would a publisher use an independent developer if they can do it just as well and more cheaply internally? **PCZ** What kind of commitment is needed by a development team in order to stand a chance of succeeding? **DANIEL** You need a team that throws itself into a project. It has to be a passion for them, rather than just a job where you go home at 5.30pm. And that means long hours.

Republic of Ireland international Ray Houghton, who was brought in for his tactical expertise and vast experience of the game. "We'd never met anyone who had such a good footballing brain as he does," explained Miles. "Before he got the job at [Crystal] Palace, he was an agent and he used to phone us up and say stuff like, 'I need a left back who's got good pace and heading ability. Can you recommend anyone from your database?'"

"We got to know him really well, and the day he lost his job at Palace I phoned him and offered him a job. So he came over and sat and watched the match engine, and every time he saw something he thought wasn't right, he'd tell us what should be happening, and we'd go off and code it."

After a quick tour of the offices, where clusters of programmers sat play-testing *Champ Man 4: Season 03/04*, or working on the company's latest project, *Eastside Hockey Manager*, it was time to move off. Miles and his team deserve their successes,

their commitment to accuracy and painstaking detail now legendary. It's been a true labour of love for over 15 years, and one that the team is clearly sad to let go. Roll on Sports Interactive's next project, which, let's face it, should be *Champ Man 5* in all but name.

DEIBUS

And so we move back to Camden Town, past the cluster of vagabonds shouting obscenities at passers-by, up the road and down a side street, arriving just in time for the meeting with Daniel Bobroff, executive producer at Deibus Studios. A very different kind of sports development house, Deibus is the outfit behind action-packed titles such as *Edgar Torronteras: Extreme Biker* and the multi-platform hit *Motocross Mania*.

Deibus was born out of Microtime, the first-ever company to sell advertising space in computer games. Bet you never thought people paid for their product placement in games, eh? Well, they do.



Deibus can take credit for the degree of freestyle elements in bike games.

MAKING YOUR OWN LUCK

"We started a small development studio in 1997, solely to create games. We didn't have any technology or a portfolio, but those were the days when it was possible to seek a publishing deal with desire and talent. Publishers would cautiously give you a contract," explains Dan.

Deibus's break was somewhat fortuitous, their proposed first project, a bike game, matching the requirements of publisher Sierra (now VU Games). But having had their lucky break, the company proceeded to show their ability by co-financing the game *Edgar Torronteras: Extreme Biker* – a PC only product that went on to sell over 150,000 copies worldwide – with Sierra. A solid start.



Daniel Bobroff

"After this we made *Motocross Mania*, which was a massive hit. It didn't sell too well in Europe, but it got to No1 in the PlayStation charts in the US, selling a million copies," says Dan. The success of

Motocross Mania propelled Deibus to the top of their field, finally providing some stiff competition to Rainbow Studios, the Microsoft-financed developer of the then market-leading motocross game, *Motocross Madness*.

"The gaming community consensus was that *Motocross Madness* was more graphically polished, but *Motocross Mania* was better in terms of gameplay. It was easier to control, had ragdoll character physics and more features. It was almost like an *ISS/FIFA* debate. We had a tenth of the budget that Rainbow had, which gives you an idea of how much the odds were stacked against us," explains Dan triumphantly.

MOTORING AHEAD

The continued success of the game was fuelled by the company's support of its many fans, who in return created new tracks for the game in their thousands. The game's revolutionary freestyle elements also made it stand out, leading to a slew of similar games that tried to emulate *Mania*'s freestyle gameplay.

"We would claim credit for the degree of freestyle influence in bike games," admits Dan. "Look at all the bike games before our ones and you'll see they're just racing games. All the ones after our games have included freestyle elements."

Deibus is currently working on a new PC project, but it's still too early for Dan to comment specifically on the nature of that title. But with the success of *Motocross Mania* propelling the company into the mainstream, and a second Deibus office having just opened in the south of France, the developer looks like it's on the road to many future successes. **PCZ**



Motocross Mania proved a huge success and was more than a match for Rainbow's heavily funded *Motocross Madness*.

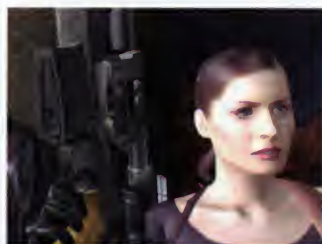
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PC ZONE



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LAST
PREVIEWED
PCZONE
ISSUE
133

Creatures of the night, exchanging glances...

THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER Activision
DEVELOPER Troika Games
ETA Spring 2004
WEBSITE
www.vampirebloodlines.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's *Deus Ex* with fangs
- Hugely dense dialogue, character options and open-ended gameplay
- Fully utilises the awesome *Half-Life 2* Source engine
- Seven different Vampire Clans, each with their own powerful disciplines
- Uses White Wolf RPG universe as source material

VAMPIRE:

THE MASQUERADE - BLOODLINES



CV



TROIKA GAMES

Famed for past glories in RPG narratives and dialogue, Troika is an American outfit for whom inventories, character points and bloody deaths are second nature.

1998 Jason Anderson, Leonard Boyarsky and Tim Cain, three of the RPG legends who created classic post-apocalyptic role-players *Fallout* and *Fallout 2*, combine their powers and create Troika Games.

2001 Troika's first game, *Arcanum: Of Steamworks & Magick Obscura*, hits the shelves. Its blend of magic and technology is a lot of fun, even if it looked a bit clunky.

2003 *The Temple Of Elemental Evil* is released. Prestigious gaming almanac *PC ZONE* awards it 76% in its Xmas issue (see page 70). Meanwhile, deep in a studio in darkest South California, *Bloodlines* nears completion.



"I went for the role of dishevelled tramp in *Deus Ex 2*, y'know."

Yesterday, **Will Porter** sat next to a Goth on a bus in Hackney. Therefore, he's the perfect candidate to preview the most revolutionary role-player of 2004

MOST OF what they say about vampires doesn't make much sense. Take the 100 per cent blood diet, for example. We all know what four beers and a tikka masala can do to your digestive system, so what the hell would a few years of only drinking blood do to your belly? It really doesn't bear thinking about. I mean there's not a lot of fibre in your average artery, is there? The idea of a bowel-conscious Nosferatu tucking into a bowl of All Bran before his nightly jaunt in search of fresh virgins won't ever be

particularly scary. And what about the bizarre hatred of garlic? Are zombies averse to parsley? Do werewolves come out in a nasty rash when they get close to nutmeg? It makes no sense.

This is where *Vampire: The Masquerade* and the White Wolf Universe of pen-and-paper gaming and its reams of stats and character classes come into play, giving a sense of order to the many and varied interpretations of vamp lore. The deal is that a few millennia ago, vampires recognised that if humans ever cottoned

When you're a vampire everyone is clearly too afraid to give you fashion tips.

THE SOURCE OF ALL EVIL

GORDON'S SHINY ENGINE USED FOR NEFARIOUS DEEDS

Purring sweetly in the background of *Bloodlines* lies the Source engine, purveyor of graphical genius to *Half-Life 2*. With its remarkable facial animation, DirectX 9 effects and a new lighting system devised by Troika, *Bloodlines* looks set to be one of the most graphically stunning RPGs ever. Above and beyond this, however, is a modified Havok 2 physics engine that looks to be so good it'll make your head bleed. If your vampire is strong enough, you'll be able to interact with the environment like never before – shifting crates, lifting small cars and generally making your presence felt. Meanwhile we shouldn't forget, as Leonard Boyarsky, joint CEO of Troika, himself points out, that "physics objects blow apart real neat". They sure do.



Troika is the first developer licence in the stunning *Half-Life 2* tech.



Let me in or I'll set your blood on fire.

on to the fact there were thousands of clammy-palmed bloodsuckers in their midst their days as the undead ethnic minority would be numbered.

So it was that the Masquerade began. Enforced through the agreement of the seven vampire clans, a mandate demanded that "thou shalt not reveal thy true nature to those not of the blood". The bloodsuckers went under cover, living among the animals they fed upon and diverting human history relentlessly in their favour. The bastards.

FIRST BLOOD

Vampire: The Masquerade - Bloodlines sees you playing a newly embraced member of 'the kindred' in a dark, Gothicised Los Angeles, filled with seedy bars, dodgy hotels and questionable ladies of the night.

Fundamentally an RPG with the trappings of *Deus Ex*'s open-ended gameplay, and a collection of armaments that would make Charlton Heston blush, *Bloodlines* is gearing up to be the first of a new breed of action-packed first-person RPGs. Powered with the same facial animation, physics engine and general jaw-dropping magnificence as *Half-Life 2*, *Bloodlines* is shaping up to be one of the most impressive releases of next year.

Before you start running around however, sneaking, seducing, baring your teeth at old ladies and working your way up through the pointy-toothed hierarchy, you've got some important decisions to make.

CHOOSE WISELY

The character creation process and, above all, which clan you join, will have a huge effect on your game. You must first decide on your allegiance; there are seven clans available and each has its own set of physical attributes, disciplines and outlook on life. You could be a Gangrel, a vamp with shape-shifting abilities, animal instincts and a bestial lust for blood; a creature more accustomed to running free in the wilderness than strip-joints in downtown LA. Alternatively, if you've



There's no clip in a revolver, you stupid blood-sucker...

UNDEAD DEATHMATCH

THE BATTLE CONTINUES ONLINE

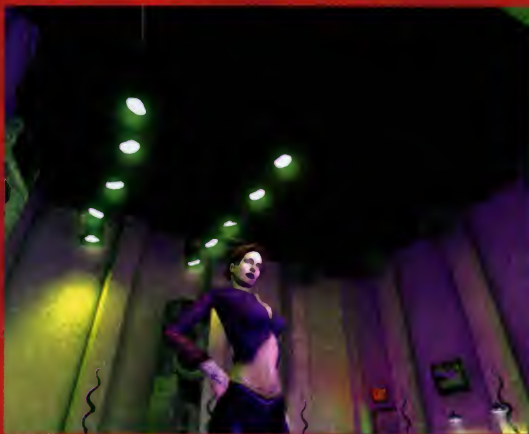
There aren't many games as complex as *Bloodlines* that come with a competent multiplayer component – games like *Deus Ex* failing miserably in this regard – but Troika is having a damn good bash at it.

"We're working very hard to ensure that the multiplayer experience is just as fun as the single-player game," underlines big-boss-man Leonard.

"The basis of multiplayer is Hunters versus Vampires, and the multiplayer scenarios link to each other to tell a mission-based story from both the human and vampire sides." Bloodsucking, blood-boiling, blood-letting and stake guns in team deathmatch? Sign us up!



The seven vampire classes put an interesting tilt on the multiplayer game.



Is it wrong to fancy the undead?



A rare moment of peace in the ZONE office.

always dreamed of being an ugly deformed monster, you could be an old-school Nosferatu with limited social skills, heightened senses, pointy ears and a talent for sneaking around and looking evil.

Taking into account the fact that you can play as either a boy or a girl vamp – an option that should provide some kinky connotations for one or two members of the ZONE team – this means there'll be a whopping 14 basic characters with which to tinker. And, as you would expect from the creators of the legendary *Fallout* series, there's more than enough character options with which to play.

"You're given a set number of points to spend to mould your character as you wish," explains Leonard Boyarsky, the joint CEO of Troika. "At the bottom it's more like *Fallout* than a D&D game – the

player is given points to spend in each of their Attribute and Ability categories, as well as points to spend on their disciplines." So you can play about with whatever you want your Vamp to be skilled at, though things like knitting, poultry-keeping and embroidery are unsurprisingly off the menu. Ranged combat, mêlée combat, sneaking, seduction and persuasion are the order of the day, as well as a variety of other roleplay stalwarts.

PATHS OF DEATH

So far, so relatively standard RPG, right? A bunch of meaningless stats that have chuff-all effect on the game itself, right? Nope. What makes the concept of *Bloodlines* so fundamentally thrilling is the way in which these attributes and skills

are meshed with the FPS game and the multiple ways in which you can complete your objectives. "There's this house you need to get into that's being guarded," explains Leonard, when probed about the open-ended gameplay. "You can fight

Take on stake-wielding humans, werewolves and the ghastly Tzimisce.

We're just taking all this in, when the man starts up again. "Oh, and you could also talk your way past the guard by using your persuasion feat. Or your seduction skills if you're a female." Anything else? "You could perhaps dominate him, or dementate him. In or out of dialogue."

Now I don't know about you, but personally I only have three ways of getting into my own house (in no particular order: keys, doorbell, bathroom window), and I've just been told about a virtual world in which there are about seven. That's pretty cool.

If you decide to go in all guns blazing, then there's a wide variety of weapons to dispose of the vamps and humans who stand in your way. Shotguns, flamethrowers, stake guns, sub-machine guns, sniper rifles and a variety of

"Bloodlines is powered with the same physics engine and general jaw-dropping magnificence as *Half-Life 2*"

your way through the front, sneak your way around to the side (although you'll need to pick the lock on the door) or go the easy way through the backyard, but then again you'd better have 'Animal Friendship' because there's a big pit-bull guarding the back door."

weapons like knives and katanas can all be utilised to make a member of the undead even more dead than he was before. The bad guys won't be stupid either. "Enemies will dynamically adjust to certain changes in the environment," promises Leonard. "They'll take cover

Why Don't You?...

LET US TAKE OUR OWN CHARACTERS INTO MULTIPLAYER

The whole point of RPG is developing your character and becoming so attached to him/her that when you're sitting at work and listlessly gazing out of the window you start to wonder what DEATHBR1NGA, your vampiric virtual companion, would do in a similar situation, generally involving the removal of spines. So why not let us take our carefully nurtured characters into battle? It would be a hell of a lot more satisfying taking an extension of your own personality into the fray rather than some random vampire model...



At last! *Big Trouble In Little China* for the PC. Whoo hoo!

behind objects and change their positions if those objects are destroyed. They'll work together in combat, and know when they're outmatched to flee accordingly."

So the AI is sounding pretty hot, but then again if I was one of these poor bad-guys, faced by a vamp who potentially had a discipline like 'blood thaumatology' (the ability to make your enemy's blood boil inside his body), then I wouldn't fight at all. I'd be running over the green hills and far away. So the NPCs can't be that clever.

ARTERIES AKIMBO

But what about the blood? Count Duckula aside, haemoglobin has always featured prominently in vamp escapades and *Bloodlines* is no exception. "Humans are cattle," explains Leonard, "but they are also to be feared and respected as there are so many of them compared to the vampires. But you'll need to feed on NPCs to get blood to power your disciplines."

To successfully feed on an unsuspecting human you'll need enough brawl skill to overcome them. If you don't, the NPC will run away screaming or attack you, depending on their AI. Alternatively, if you're one of the more suave and sexy vamps, you could seduce your prey and convince them that it would be a great idea to open up his/her veins. Either way, a successful conquest will give you plenty of juice to let rip with your powers round the next corner.

YOU BEAST

Unfortunately there's a price to pay for this arterial promiscuity, if you completely drain a victim of their life juice or run around gunning down innocent bystanders then

you will lose humanity points. If you stray too far away from what is morally human, you are more likely to reach a point of 'frenzy' – absolute bloodlust. In this state, you lose control of your character and he/she will home in on the nearest blood source, no matter what their relation to you or how big a gun they are carrying. In contrast, because of the open nature of the game, you can go against vampiric convention and do nice things to people (bake cakes, heal sick puppies, buy fags for teens loitering outside newsagents. That kind of thing. Maybe...) and stick points back on to your humanity register.

If your humanity points start getting low then there'll be less speech options available to you and even the most sophisticated of Toreadors will start grunting, scratching their arse and gesticulating in a brutish manner. In the past, Troika bods have proved to be absolute masters of character-dependent branching dialogue, above all in the myriad of sprawling conversations found in *Fallout* and *Fallout 2*, so dialogue in *Bloodlines* promises to be something pretty special. NPCs will react to your clan, your reputation and if on a previous visit you caved in their cousin's head with



Roomy, spacious, fundamentally evil.

YOU MUST LEARN CONTROL!

THE IMPORTANCE OF DISCIPLINE IN THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG VAMPIRES

Vampire Disciplines are the Force Powers of the cold-blooded world, and Troika has been a bit cagey in terms of providing an exhaustive list of what there will be and to which clan each will be applicable. However, Uncle ZONE has been prodding and perusing and has decided that the following are dead certs:

CELERITY: The good old fashioned 'you speed up while the world slows down' option, it lets you get more canines into more virgins in less time.

BLOOD THAUMATOLOGY: One of the more bizarre and nasty disciplines is the ability to heat up an enemy's bloodstream until it hits boiling point. Whether or not steam comes out of their ears is yet to be seen.

PRESENCE: Presumably a trait of the commandeering Ventruel clan, Presence will help you as a leader. Those around you will be calmer and have a much better aim, while your enemies will be petrified of your masterful demeanour.

DEMENTATION: Some of the vamps are more than a little insane, namely the Malkavian clan, and this discipline allows them to infect NPCs with their psychosis and make them all crazy.

OBFUSCATION: A skill practised by the sneaky Nosferatu clan, the Obfuscate discipline allows almost complete invisibility at high levels, although at first you'll only go unnoticed if you stand still and hide in the shadows.

AURA PERCEPTION: A skill that'll show you how an NPC is feeling, specifically towards you. So if they're starting to like you or if they're about to plunge a stake through your heart, you'll see the colour of their aura change. At higher levels you'll even be able to see through walls.



A tricky vamp attempts to obfuscate us with her cleavage.

"There's a price to pay for arterial promiscuity – losing humanity points"

an iron bar then the chances are they won't be hugely receptive to you. In turn, you'll respond through dialogue options dependant on your clan's attributes and skills, your humanity rating, the way in which you distributed your character points at the start of the game and, if you did jam an iron bar into someone's brain cavity earlier, the naughty things you've been up to during the game.

"Some of your lines appear in different colours and fonts," adds Leonard. "This signifies that it's a line that uses one of your powers or feats." So you'll be able to Dominate, Dementate, Persuade, Seduce and Intimidate should you be good enough at each skill. In most cases a quick 'please' or 'thank you' would probably suffice, but I suppose the undead aren't exactly famed for their courtesy.

Making a hugely complex genre cross-over title like *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines* is a hard task. There is no doubt Leonard and his buddies are juggling a lot of balls (dialogue, combat, AI, story, character creation etc), and all are so enmeshed by the nature of the game that even dropping one would cause untold damage to the end product. But Troika have all the right tools; they've got the most astounding engine in PC gaming history, they've got the rich backdrop of the White Wolf universe, they've got a team of established RPG gods and, well, they've got vampires which are always cool. (Apart from when they're crowbarred into *The Matrix*.) *Bloodlines* is set to be 60 hours of gaming genius that's going to make standing in graveyards at midnight and looking pissed off a fun and trendy activity. We can't wait. **EW**



KONAMI

APOCALYPTICA™

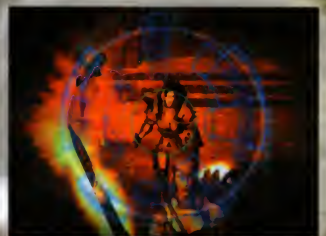
"THE LORD IS A MAN OF WAR"

Exodus 15:3

"An intense third-person action/adventure"
PC Zone

Sometimes prayers are not enough... words alone will not stop evil from conquering the world. Take up your chainsaw, pump action shotgun and sword. Do not lose faith. Do not cower from the evil hordes of Satan. Embrace your controller. Trust in God, your fighting arm, the chaos that you wreak and in magic. Amen.

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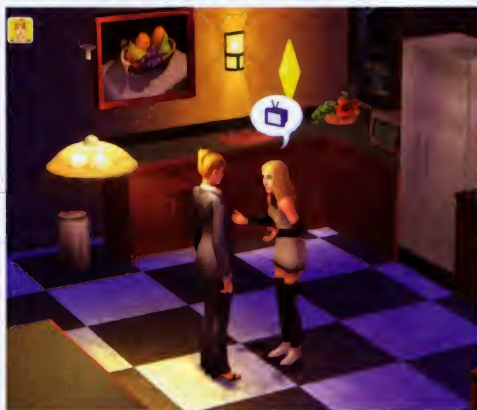


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Play a videogame in a videogame! Whoa man, that's like, so postmodern and shit.



It's so American we just wanna puke.



The perfect world, according to EA.



Unfortunately you still can't go on a killing spree.

THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER Maxis
ETA Spring 2004
WEBSITE www.thesims2.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Proper sequel to the best-selling PC game ever
- Fully 3D environments
- Sims physically age
- Create-A-Sim feature
- Buildings over two storeys high!
- Imaginary friends



The fallout of a sim drug binge.

Wave goodbye, say hello... THE SIMS 2

Love them or hate them, the little computer people are here to stay. And so it seems is *Steve Hill*

HOW DO YOU go about creating a sequel to the biggest-selling PC game franchise of all time? A game that has single-handedly bucked the demographic of PC gaming, embracing the casual player while alienating the hardcore? It's a tricky proposition, but there's little sign of panic at the Maxis office, half an hour outside San Francisco. With the walls adorned with artwork from *Sim* titles down the years employees beaver away in their individual cubes, emerging only to chow down on a quality selection of food and beverages. It's almost like a slightly less surreal version of the game. *Sim Sims* anyone?

Top Sim is of course Will Wright, the man who started it all. Among other things, this has earned him an office with a view, outside of which sits an impressively comprehensive shrine to Elvis Presley. Having sold 24 million copies, he's probably not that worried (Will, not Elvis), but he is aware of how *The Sims* is perceived.

"One of the things we're planning to address in *The Sims 2* is to make a game that is strategically really deep and one

that will appeal to the hardcore gamers," he explains. "And also graphically state-of-the-art, which *The Sims* never was. The feeling of immersion in *The Sims 2* is much higher, it feels much more immersive than looking down on to little toy characters."

THE GENERATION GAME

That much is evident from a quick scan at this page, with the game boasting full 3D environments and intelligent lighting. But there is far more to *The Sims 2* than a bit of cosmetic surgery. Probably the biggest advance is the fact that your Sims now

As well as the signs of ageing, other physical aspects will also be visible, with lazy, greedy Sims sporting grotesque paunches, for instance. Physical features can be handed down via DNA, something worth considering when designing their faces using the new Create-A-Sim tool, which should be downloadable before the game is even released.

Throughout your Sims' lives, instilling good key memories is crucial to achieving a high Life Score. So having a first kiss as a teenager will see them in good stead; having it at the age of 58 probably less so. Sims will also be far

"As well as ageing, physical features of your Sim can be handed down via DNA"

physically age, going through six generational stages, namely baby, toddler, child, teenager, adult and elder (followed by worm food). Gone is the static *Groundhog Day* approach of the original game, as depending on your Sims' time of life – and indeed their personalities – their needs and behaviour will be vastly different.

more complex than in the previous game, and their experiences – good or bad – will have a tangible effect on their behaviour. So if you manage to raise a shiny happy Cornflakes family, you'll be repaid with a decent Life Score. Alternatively, screw up their lives and you'll turn out a generation of embittered, angry sociopaths. Welcome to the real world. **EW**

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activision.com



Dragons. Don't start a barbecue without one.

THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER Ubisoft
DEVELOPER Rapid Eye Entertainment
ETA December 2003
WEBSITE lordsforeverquest.station.sony.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Three playable sides and 15 different Lords
- Lots of familiar EQ characters and powers
- Powerful 3D engine with three zoom levels
- Ability to level up your characters and carry them from mission to mission

CV



RAPID EYE ENTERTAINMENT

Lords Of EverQuest is the debut title for San Diego-based Rapid Eye Entertainment, but the team members behind the RTS have an illustrious pedigree, so don't worry, the world of Norrath is in safe hands. Here's what some of the lads have been up to...

1990 *Eye Of The Beholder*. This famous AD&D game was basically a dungeon crawl in the sewers of Waterdeep, in an attempt to mimic some of the success that *Dungeon Master* had garnered some three years earlier.

1995 *Heroes Of Might And Magic*. Rapid's CEO Mark Caldwell and several other members of the LoE team were behind many of the titles in this long-running turn-based fantasy RTS series.

2002 *Dungeon Siege*. Sublime hack'n'slash action in a beautiful 3D world. So you can rest easy that at the very least *Lords Of EverQuest* will be a nice-looking game.

The bearded gentry...

LORDS OF EVERQUEST

Rhianna Pratchett swaps skipping across the plains of Norrath for shouting at miniaturised monsters



LOVE IT like life itself or detest it like a pop-up from the Gator Corporation, *EverQuest* is here to stay. The original game may be entering its twilight years, but goblin-fanciers everywhere are rubbing their club-like appendages in anticipation of *EverQuest II*, due some time next year. But if you're not content to sit back and sip mead in this time of inter-generational lull, the EQ beast is pushing vigorously into other, less-familiar territories. So, you've got the likes of *Champions Of Norrath* and *EverQuest Online Adventures* popping up on PS2, while back home on the PC you've got this – *Lords Of EverQuest*, the first Norrath-based RTS.

THE USUAL SUSPECTS

Even though the game is set 10,000 years before the online game, in a world of chaos, vying forces and lost magical

artifacts, it's not just carrying the *EverQuest* name for show (in case you were starting to smell a cheap cash-in). All the creatures in the game and many of their attributed powers have come directly

sharing a strong bond with the natural world; while the Dawn Brotherhood is made up of dwarven paladins, barbarians and humans. The token 'bad' guys are those belonging to the Shadowrealm

"With a month left for polishing, the game is already looking accomplished"

from the MMORPG, so fans will be right at home. Like *WarCraft III*, *Lords Of EverQuest* relies on a strong storyline and single-player campaign, with 75 hours of combined gameplay before you get stuck into multiplayer.

The majority of the action revolves around three different factions, fitting your standard RTS 'good, bad and somewhere-in-between' formula. The Eldar Alliance is a collection of elves, hobbits and other hippie creatures, all

faction, who, in true bad-guy form, get the best lines and the best costumes.

LORDY LORDY

Each side has its own selection of five battle 'Lords' who are the strongest units in the game. As well as having their own powers that they gain as they level-up, they offer various aura benefits that affect surrounding units. Lords are your personal representatives on the battlefield, and looking after them and lovingly building



Elves have ears like Dumbo, but they're handy with a longbow.

them up is one of the key combat elements in the game. In some ways, the Lords feature is quite reminiscent of a turn-based strategy game, which comes as no great surprise since many of the developers behind *Lords Of EverQuest* worked on the *Heroes Of Might And Magic* series.

The concentration on individual units over waves of troops is also a nice balance to the growing number of strategy games that seem to be adopting the "more is more" outlook. Rapid Eye Entertainment has even gone so far as to put a cap of 50 units per side, which seems quite sparse until you realise what you can do with them (see below).

Looks-wise, LoE bears more than a passing resemblance to Blizzard's



Take good care of your units and they'll grow up big and strong.

This is what happens to naughty ogres. Maybe good ones too.

aforementioned goblin 'em up, and also utilises a powerful 3D engine that enables you to zoom in close to the action should you so desire. Although *WarCraft III* looks rather rough up close, LoE manages to retain its good looks at full zoom, even if it is impractical to command your battles from behind an ogre's left ear.

ARMED SOURCES

The resource management in the game is pretty standard. There are 20 different building types per side, all suitably fantastical-looking in design and able to churn out specific units and upgrades, while clockwork spiders and weird crab-women trundle around doing the resource gathering.

However, one of the particularly nice aspects of the game (and a feature often overlooked if it's done right and moaned about constantly when it's wrong) is the interface. Each section of the customisable interface – from the mini-map to the commands menu – can be stretched, shrunk, moved around and switched on and off at will. This is unusually handy, especially if you want to concentrate on drinking in the battle visuals.

Lords Of EverQuest definitely has a lot of promise and, with a month left for polishing, the game is already looking accomplished. The impressive CVs of the developers should ensure it turns out to be a great RTS in its own right, with or without the hook of its big brother. **82**

ON THE LEVEL

LET YOUR UNITS LEARN WITH YOU. AWWW

All your units in *Lords Of Everquest* will be able to gain experience and level-up as they fight in the same way as the MMORPG characters. Once they reach level six you can wave your sword of leadership and knight them, endowing them with extra abilities and the power to lead their own squads.

This could lead to some interesting tactics in the game. A simple points system permits you to carry surviving units from game to game and seamlessly level them up, enabling you to nurture your favourite units into mighty behemoths. With any luck this will go some way to stopping online players from rushing in with swarms of minor units, as a cared for and cultivated higher level creature will have no problem doing away with a bunch of rookies. But, on the other hand, if you don't fight, your creatures aren't going to gain any experience by just sitting back at base digging up toe jam.



Exchange your points for a few familiar faces.



Who's for a pint and a shag?

ARMED & DANGEROUS

LAST
PREVIEWED
PCZONE
ISSUE
130

Pubs, land-sharks, teacups and nob jokes – it can only be the new game from the makers of MDK. Anthony Holden gets the first round in...



The Grunt of Polewart – home of the resistance and the best place to get a new weapon, a pint or a wrestling partner.

"IMAGINE sitting in front of the heads of LucasArts, trying to explain how their next great game will feature a mole, a self-aware robot who drinks tea, a dirty thief and a mad filthy old man."

It's not the most comfortable situation imaginable, but it's one that Nick Bruty, president, co-artists and designer at Planet Moon Studios, faced when he pitched the idea for his latest – and most gleefully explosive – action game, *Armed & Dangerous*. It's a third-person action affair,

THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER Activision

DEVELOPER Planet Moon Studios

ETA March 2004

WEBSITE www.lucasarts.com/products/armedanddangerous

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Non-stop, over-the-top mayhem from the makers of *Giants: Citizen Kabuto*
- Loads of silly humorous touches
- Hundreds of enemies to gun down in huge, lavish landscapes
- Eccentric weapons including land-sharks and mini black holes

featuring a fairly standard mix of running, shooting, flying and blowing stuff up. But like every other game the nutters at Planet Moon have created, from *Earthworm Jim* through to *Giants: Citizen Kabuto*, it's far from ordinary execution.

DARK SIDE OF THE MOON

For starters, how often do you see a game with a gun that fires sharks into the ground, which subsequently 'swim' towards enemies like Jaws and engulf them from below? A game in which you can turn the world upside down for a few seconds and then watch as enemies plummet from the skies to their deaths? Or one where you can stick a grenade on an unsuspecting penguin and watch as it runs panicked into a flock of enemies and explodes in their midst?

Unless you've been experimenting with a lot of illicit substances lately, the answer to all these questions is probably 'not very often'. And when you combine all this with a frantic pace and a world in which practically everything will explode given the right encouragement,

you get one of the most frenzied, over-the-top and downright hysterical games to appear on the PC since, well... *Giants: Citizen Kabuto*.

"I think we've been (slowly) honing in on exactly the type of game we like to make," explains Nick. "Getting the balance between action/story/characters right and finding out just how different we can make it before we turn people off. With Games like *MDK* and *Giants* we were all dazzled by the possibilities of 3D games and we experimented all over the place. There are some bizarre and wonderful things in those games, but maybe a few too many bizarre ones. Now I'd say we're much more focused and tuned into exactly what is good about our games."

Having spent the past few weeks furiously playing *Armed & Dangerous* – the first playable version with all 21 levels and four bonus missions in place – I can only nod dumbly and agree. The game is just as whacked-out as *MDK* and *Giants* in terms of characterisation and storyline – more so if anything – but the overall



The "Gurner" Personal Mortar can take down pretty much anything that moves.



Operation Wolf-style shoots are interspersed with run-and-gun levels.



The burst-fire rocket pack adds a crucial extra dimension to the action.

CV



PLANET MOON STUDIOS

Famed for their originality and quirky sense of humour, Planet Moon was formed in 1998 when the team behind *MDK* broke away from Shiny Entertainment. The company is based in Sausalito, California, and retains a small-scale, independent spirit, with a core team of just nine mildly insane staff members.

2000 *Giants: Citizen Kabuto* is released. The first (and currently only) release under the Planet Moon name, *Giants* was a hugely imaginative action/strategy game, pitting three unique races at each other's throats in a battle for survival. Bloody good it was too.

2003 *Armed & Dangerous* makes its first appearance at the E3 games expo in LA. Amid all the excitement of the show it got a bit lost, but now that we've played it we can't wait for the finished product.

experience is far more accessible. The humour has been pushed to the fore, and though the action is more straightforward than the likes of *Giants*, this is balanced by a distinctly improbable array of weapons (see boxout) and a level of non-stop intensity rarely found outside the arcade.

"The primary gameplay objective for *Armed & Dangerous* was fulfilling the credo: every second is fun," grins Aaron Loeb, producer at Planet Moon. "The goal was to have a game that never slogged on or weighed you down, but was constantly fun, over-the-top action. Now the game is almost complete, we feel like it's a resounding success, except for second 14,567 when that one dull thing happens. But it's only one second."

MURDER DEATH KILL

The game casts you as Roman, East London native and leader of a wantonly motley group of thieves-cum-freedom fighters known as the Lionhearts (the aforementioned mole, robot and dirty old man). Through a series of loosely

connected missions, you're given the taxing duties of running around shooting royal troops (ranging from goblin-like grunts to wild twiglets), blowing stuff up, occasionally rescuing a few ungrateful peasants and zooming through the sky on your rocket jetpack. Sometimes you work alone, sometimes the Lionhearts are with you, throwing their all into the fray.

And it's as simple as that. Except that while you're going about these tasks, there are thunderous explosions going off all around you, zeppelins shooting at you with underslung rocket launchers, snipers taking potshots from distant aeries, enemies parachuting in to reinforce their comrades, boulders tumbling from mountaintops, giant robots lumbering around with chainguns and, of course,

WEAPONS OF MASS SILLINESS

BORED OF AK-47S AND RAILGUNS? GET READY FOR A WEIRD AND WONDERFUL NEW BREED OF WEAPONRY

Alongside a healthy line-up of conventional weapons, such as machine guns, rifles, sniper rifles and discus-like sticky grenades, *Armed & Dangerous* features some genuinely unconventional armaments that are sure to become the game's trademark. Some are merely variations on existing weapons, like the Vindaloo Rocket Launcher that fires volleys of homing rockets and the tuba-like grenade launcher, but a few are just plain barny...



LANDSHARK GUN

This mad device fires baby sharks into the ground, which grow to whopping 25-foot monsters and chase down targeted enemies one by one. You only see their fins until they burst out from underneath their prey and wolf them down in a hungry display.



MINI BLACK HOLE

Reminiscent of *MDK*, the world's smallest black hole comes in an ordinary cardboard box. Throw it in the direction of some bad guys and the black hole will pop out, expand to fill the skies and suck in enemies until it reaches its capacity and pops.



TOPSY TURVY

The superb Topsy Turvy is a device you hang on to while it screws into the ground. When activated, it causes the whole world to turn upside down, with any enemies in the area falling up from the world. When the world rights itself, they plummet to their deaths.



KNOCKOUT

Not the most effective weapon, but amusing nonetheless, the Knockout is a big magnetic boxing glove. Target an enemy with the glove and he'll be pulled towards you, giving you the chance to wind up and send him flying, ten-pin style, into his fellows.



GUY FAWKES TRAITOR BOMB

Not as pyrotechnically driven as the name might suggest, this device is used to hypnotise enemies and turn them against each other. "It's a happy way to bring down a big gang of enemies," smiles Planet Moon's wacky Nick Bruty.



Enemies literally come at you from all directions and include rocket troops, ogre-like Goliaths and psychopathic monks.

sharks shooting up out of the ground eating unsuspecting grunts. It makes the Gaza Strip look like the Costa del Sol.

Indeed, the only respite comes when you pop in to your local pub (there's a friendly Grunt & Polewart on every level) to wet your whistle and restock on guns and ammo. In the pubs, which are decidedly British establishments, you'll invariably enter in the middle of conversation, only to hear a comment like, "Right, who's for a pint and a shag?" and it's this type of humour that forms the whole comic theme of the game. All the enemies, who generally have plenty to say, boast some sort of silly European accent, be it Irish ("Me poor beautiful arse"), Scottish ("Ooh, right in tha scrotum") or a strained kind of Pythonesque French ("I'll keel you and keel you some more").

"The humour comes from the mind of our creative director, Tim Williams," informs Aaron. "His inspiration is usually assumed to be Monty Python, but he insists he's really far more inspired by the events of his misspent youth in the opium dens of Calcutta."

Whatever the inspiration, it's a decidedly 'undergraduate' style of

warm. Your mates Q and Jonesy are standing by a dead lizard thing, a frozen Rexus held confidently in Q's robotic grip. But just as Jonesy the mole is saying, "Oh I've seen this done before, you're going to cut open the lizard and...", Q has already shoved the frozen Rexus right up the lizard's Gary Glitter. And sure enough it wasn't dead after all.

"Your robot mate Q has shoved Rexus up the dead lizard's Gary Glitter. And sure enough, the lizard wasn't dead"

humour that prevails (read: bum and nob jokes). One memorable cut-scene plays on the scene from *The Empire Strikes Back* in which Han Solo cuts open a dead Tauntaun to keep Luke

There's plenty of similar examples, and while it's all still a bit hit and miss at this stage, there's enough good material here to propel *Armed & Dangerous* into that rarefied realm of genuinely funny games. We were initially a bit worried that because a lot of the humour is based around British accents and stereotypes, it wouldn't go down too well here in the UK, but Nick seems unconcerned. "As a bunch of us are Brits, it's quite



Kaboom! Bang! Take that! Ha ha! Etc...

Q&A

AARON LOEB



We have a rather silly chat with the producer of *Armed & Dangerous*...

PCZ How did you start in the industry?

AL My work in the games industry started when I came up with the idea for *Pong* at the age of four, which was promptly stolen by Nolan Bushnell.

PCZ Where would you say the inspiration came from for the gameplay in *Armed & Dangerous*?

AL The gameplay was inspired by the drawing room comedies of Noel Coward, the poetry of John Keats and, of course, Oscar Wilde's *Picture Of Dorian Gray* – the part where Gray uses the rocket launcher to blow up four buildings at once in particular.

PCZ What's your favourite weapon in *A&D* and why?

AL Oh, the Landshark. Nothing reassures more than marching into battle flanked by a couple of sharks.

PCZ Will there be more destructible objects in the PC version compared to the console version?

AL Yes. There wasn't going to be, but just because you asked, I'm going to make something that wasn't destructible before into something destructible. Anything else you'd like?

PCZ Umm... monkeys in parachutes? No...? Well, what other differences can we expect in the PC version?

AL Higher resolution, more colours, sharper visual quality and (depending on the PC) blazingly fast performance. Some sections that run at 30fps on the Xbox are as high as 90fps on PC.

PCZ What are your plans for multiplayer, if any?

AL For *Armed & Dangerous* we've focused all of our effort on a satisfying single-player experience.

PCZ If you had to sum the game up in ten words or less...?

AL I can't count that high, but it will be bloody great.





It's hard to find a moment in *A&D* when something isn't exploding.



"Stop, stop. We surrender - just don't play that damn tuba again."



Mission tasks are kept simple, here returning captured peasants to their homes.

important. I think you'll appreciate what we're trying to do. There's an aspect to the comedy that allows us to push quite far and get away with it. You don't have to be a Brit to 'get' it, but I hope you'll all laugh twice as loud."

SHE'S A LOOKER

Another hugely impressive aspect of the game is the level environments. While they start off small and simple, with some snowy mountain villages to negotiate in linear fashion, they soon blossom into vast, lavishly detailed affairs, lent all the more charm by the fact that you can whoosh around them with your turbo-jump pack. By about the eighth level in, we found ourselves literally gaping at the beauty

of some of the levels, which range from vast pseudo-medieval cities clinging to the peaks and ledges of grassy canyons, to grim early-industrial factories belching fire and smoke from every orifice.

After every three or four objective-based missions, you're also treated to a tempo-breaking 'defend the town' level, in which you man a kind of turret-gun atop a wall and mow down wave upon wave of attackers. In the current build these are a bit unchallenging, but there's certainly a degree of fun to be had sending hundreds of bodies flying as they try to breach your defences. Says Nick: "The key image for the game in our minds when we began was this: one man, flanked by a robot and a mole, standing on top of a wall with an entire army coming at him. The game has

IT'S THE LIONHEARTS

INTRODUCING YOUR MOTLEY CREW OF WOULD-BE THIEVES

While some of the missions are handled in solo fashion, your hearty fellows are never far away, and frequently fight alongside you in combat. Here, Planet Moon boss Nick Bruty gives us his personal take on the strange bunch of fellows they call the Lionhearts...



ROMAN - THE BOSS

"Roman's a leader who is absolutely focused on the task at hand. It was his idea that they attempt the 'World's Ultimate Heist', and lucky for us he did, or else we wouldn't have a bleedin' game for you, now would we?"



JONESY - THE MOLE

"Jonesy's a rude git who loves blowing stuff up, although he tends to overdo it. You'll often see him attaching a five-stick bundle of dynamite to just one enemy soldier, when it's pretty clear that just three or four sticks would produce the desired effect."



Q - THE ROBOT

"Q is a large debonair robot who loves his tea and we all know that tea-loving robots always have a dark and violent side. You'll see Q lower his gun and charge into the fray, fighting hand to hand, not spilling one drop of his char. Now that's bloody brilliant if you ask me!"

always been about overwhelming odds (and pints - many, many pints)."

While *Armed & Dangerous* is shaping up to be a hugely enjoyable game, there are definitely a few things that need attention. For a start, the learning curve is way too gentle. For a game that sells itself on non-stop frantic action, the opening levels are too sedate and linear compared to what awaits five or six levels in. The auto-aim is far too forgiving, offering you a massive cross hair with

which to target enemies, and this inevitably makes the run-and-gun sections feel a bit sloppy. There's also quite a stingy limit on how many weapons you can carry.

HARD TO PORT

Clearly, however, most of these problems are merely a hangover from the Xbox version, which is running slightly ahead of the PC game in development terms. Gunning down waves of enemies is far easier with a mouse and keyboard than it is when you're wrestling with a tiny Xbox joystick, and the PC game needs to be recalibrated to account for this. Ideally, the PC version needs more enemies, more weapons, more stuff to blow up and, well, just more stuff in general.

There's a good few months left to fix these niggles, and we feel confident that Planet Moon will take care of business. They've never let us down in the past, and if they can just tweak the balance a bit this time, they'll have another sure-fire action classic on their hands. **PC**

Why Don't You?...

LEAVE OUR BODIES ALONE!

One of the best things about *Armed & Dangerous* is the preposterous body count, which spirals into the hundreds after just a few short missions. At the moment, the bodies disappear moments after dying, in typical console-game fashion, but it would be brilliant if the developers could harness the PC's greater memory resources to allow bodies to stay on the ground and pile up where they fell. Maybe the processing hit would be too great, but the visual and comic impact of seeing literal mounds and foothills of grunts forming, and being able to send them flying left and right with a well-placed rocket, would be undeniably superb.



Enemies fall in their hundreds.

AN
ANCIENT
CONSPIRACY

A
BROKEN CODE

AN
UNSOLVED
MURDER

THE
ULTIMATE
ADVENTURE

BROKEN SWORD

THE SLEEPING DRAGON



'THE REBIRTH OF A GENRE' - 87% PC GAMER

9/10 OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE



PC
CD
ROM



PlayStation²



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**NO CORPORATE HOSPITALITY.
NO CELEBRITY GIRLFRIENDS.
NO PRAWN SANDWICHES.
REAL FOOTBALL. REAL FANS.**



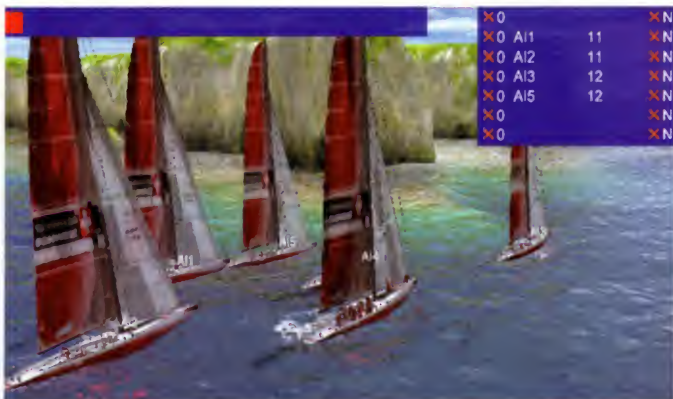
Does my behind look a-vast in this?



One pie too many back at the club?



Life on the poop deck.



I think AI's winning.



The Egyptian team gets a bit confused.

Some like it yacht...

VIRTUAL SKIPPER 3

As the world of virtual reality sailing sims finally weighs anchor, Paul Presley checks that all is ship-shape and Bristol fashion

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Nadeo
PUBLISHER Digital Jesters
WEBSITE www.virtualskipper3.com
ETA November 2003

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Glorious water effects
- Realistic sense of wind
- Online regattas
- How many sailing sims have you seen?



Quick, call Sir Francis Drake.

OH COME ON! A virtual sailing sim! How can you not love a world in which virtual sailing sims not only exist (complete with online regattas), but they flourish well enough to have made it to a third in the series? THIS, right here, is why the games industry exists. Forget about all your Lara World Cups and your FIFA Crofts. A no-holds-barred exploration of the world of the yachtsmateer is where you'll find me as happy as a sandboy. But then I always have enjoyed getting my hands round a mariner's package.

YO HO HO...

You may have missed my previous effusiveness regarding the *Virtual Skipper* series (contained as it was within a single quarter-page review some time back in the mists of issue 127), but basically I'm a fan. It's a singular market and no mistake, but it did exactly what it said on the tin and did it with panache, vim, verve and élan. There's a lot to be said for staying up until four in the morning indulging in watersports with a Brazilian sailor.

And you certainly can't accuse *Virtual Skipper 3* of resting on its predecessor's

laurels. Scanning the list of additions, you can't help but feel that our grand score of 79 per cent somehow went to the developer's head. Complete regattas, six accurately modelled environments, terrain editors, challenge modes, spectator

"You'll be pushed to find better water effects anywhere in the gaming world"

options, online events with real human umpires, satellite maps – it's a positive smorgasbord of nautical goodness.

... AND A BOTTLE OF RUM

Which would all be for nought if Nadeo didn't have the aesthetic skill to back up its passion. You're going to be hard pushed to find better water effects anywhere in the gaming world, but the rest of the graphics are equally as enticing. Your boat crews move around with almost military precision, the varying wind and weather effects all show in the realistic fluttering of your sails and the scenery is nothing short of superb. Sailing under Sydney Harbour Bridge at sunset is

an experience to make any landlubber want to find his sea legs. Just hearing the sound of the wind buffeting and the waves crashing against your hull will have you emptying your lunch over the side of your desk if you're not careful.

OK, you're all looking at me like I'm mad but this is a growing genre. Not specifically sailing sims, but this whole concept of 'niche' pastimes making it into the virtual world. Not all of them get past the novelty factor (five minutes of pretending to be a horse-racing manager is probably enough for anyone), but not all of them treat their subject matter with as much care and attention as *Virtual Skipper 3*.

Find out for yourself next issue, when we'll be bringing you an exclusive playable demo. Yesterday a modest quarter-page review, today a gushing full-page preview, tomorrow the cover! Why are you laughing? **EW**

Trouble in paradise...

MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT

Steve Hill flies to LA to discover how America won the war



THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER EALA

ETA www.mohaa.ea.com

WEBSITE Winter 2004

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Official sequel to ZONE's one-time favourite shooter
- Authentic recreation of the Pacific theatre
- New game engine
- Development team includes Hollywood artists

CV



ELECTRONIC ARTS

The world's biggest games publisher, EA's impressive portfolio has been hugely boosted by the *Medal Of Honor* series, and that success looks set to continue with *Pacific Assault*. They still can't spell 'honour' properly though...

2002 *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* rocks our world with what is essentially an interactive version of *Saving Private Ryan*. The Omaha Beach invasion goes down as one of gaming's greatest moments.

2002 *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault - Spearhead* was more of the same, the add-on taking in France, Belgium, Germany and Russia, as well as offering up some new characters and weapons.

2003 *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault - Breakthrough* milked the first game further, taking you on a tour of Italy and into the dusty battlefields of North Africa.

WORLD WAR II may have irrevocably changed history and traumatised a generation, but as far as the games industry is concerned, it's the war that keeps on giving. Arguably its biggest gift was the phenomenal *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*, the game entering our Shooters chart at number one with a bullet (or several thousand) and finally displacing the epic *Half-Life*. The inevitable sequel is well under way, and it looks like being a very different proposition. Having extensively explored the European theatre in the original and its brace of expansion packs, the *Medal Of Honor* universe is heading East, starting at Pearl Harbor, heading for Tokyo and culminating in the assault on the Tarawa Atoll at the end of 1943.

Pacific Assault senior producer Matt Powers explains the thinking behind this move: "About a year ago, after *Allied Assault* was finished, the team got together and started talking about what the next full product was going to be. The big thing to come out of it was where do we want the theatre of operations to be? The more we researched Europe, we found there were a lot more battles and interesting historical places to go, but we thought it would be really more interesting to go to the Pacific on this next product. The first thing we did was to talk to our partners around the world to determine if this was going to be a good idea for the franchise. Is it going to be popular in Europe? Is it going to be popular in Japan? This was one of our big concerns."

Understandably so, as the Japanese attack on the American fleet is one of the more contentious areas of the conflict. However, the message back from Japan was that they were happy to see the game go ahead, providing it didn't bastardise the Emperor. So don't expect to see him appear as an end-of-level boss.

KEEPING IT REAL

What you can expect is some extreme attention to detail, as the *Medal Of Honor* games are nothing if not exhaustively researched. Taking a tour of the EALA office is akin to visiting a WWII museum, the walls bedecked with maps, photos and paraphernalia from the period.

As Powers says: "The first thing we do is a lot of research. We research



Want to fly a plane?
Not in this game.



Have to talk to my landlord about this grass...



Everyone loves a fireworks display.



**"You will actually witness your
three squad-mates age, as their
young skin is ravaged by war"**



"There's something out there, but ain't no man."



Never disturb someone squatting in the grass.

what the battles were like, we read a lot of books, we hire consultants, who come in and teach us what it was like to fight the Japanese. What were the Japanese strategies? What kind of clothing did they wear? What weapons did they use?"

It soon became apparent this conflict was a world away from the type of war being waged in Europe, and – as such from the gameplay in *Allied Assault* – something that was to have a marked effect on the game's development.

THEATRE OF CRUELTY

"The Pacific theatre is a lot different from the European theatre," says Powers, "primarily in terms of the terrain you're fighting in. In the Pacific, we're fighting on islands and in jungles, so we have a lot more terrain elements, more water, more foliage. When we started thinking about that in terms of our game design, we realised our technology's going to have to change in order to adapt to this new gameplay. In addition, we realised the tech we've been using for *Allied Assault*, *Spearhead* and *Breakthrough* is starting to become a little dated for the PC. And when we're talking about PCs, especially first-person shooters, technology is a



Honey, I shrunk the 357th Airborne.

"Characters boast moving tongues, Adam's apples and light-sensitive eyes"

critical part of that audience and that feel. So with those two things combined, the design element and our ageing tech, we needed to develop a new technology. We did look at some off-the-shelf licensed tech out there, but we found they couldn't deliver our design requirement: large open environments, foliage, water, new AI, new collision, new physics."

It would appear to have been a wise decision, as from our sneak peek, the bespoke engine looks capable of rendering the game's complex jungle environments with considerable aplomb. Grass billows in the breeze, water ripples when disturbed and the assorted flora and fauna really feel alive.

The physics is also up to scratch, thanks to the integration of the *de rigueur* Havok engine. We were shown a bridge being blown up with planks tumbling into the water below, each displaying its own buoyancy as well as reacting to collisions.

Scripted events are far less rigidly implemented than in *Allied Assault*, with so-called procedural AI making for slightly

Why Don't You?...

BECOME A JAPANESE PRISONER OF WAR...

Imagine getting captured by the enemy, locked in a bamboo cage and fed a bowl of rice a day. Not necessarily a gripping interactive experience, but it would be good fun to escape, or even spring your squad mates. And while you're about it you could blow up the bridge on the River Kwai. Or wait 30 years for Chuck Norris to turn up.



Somebody get a cloth for this camera!



"If it bleeds, we can kill it."

SLICK RICK

SHOW US YOUR DEV TEAM

No preview of a *Medal Of Honor* game would be complete without mention of the fact that 22 of the original *Allied Assault* team upped sticks and left to work on the awesome *Call Of Duty*. We cornered executive producer Rick Giolito, who duly fielded every query with the smoothness of Teflon. It finally fell to ZONE to deliver the killer question, at which point he momentarily buckled – like when Bruno caught Tyson in the first – before rallying strongly and dismissing reaction to the mass walkout as "much ado about nothing".

different outcomes to events.

And, of course, the obligatory ragdoll physics are in full effect.

As for the story, you are raw recruit Tom Conlin, stationed at Pearl Harbor, when the whole shooting match goes off. Tragically you are killed, and the game ends

expertise is already evident, with characters boasting moving tongues, Adam's apples and even eyes that react to light. According to Powers: "When players interact with other characters in the game, we want them to feel like they're talking to someone who's real and has a personality."

HONOURABLE DISCHARGE

Pacific Assault will still be about action though, often frantic due to the Japanese strategy of banzai attacks, whereby everyone basically steams in with little regard for their personal safety. This is apparently a legitimate tactic, and one that the Japanese soldiers adopted if their leader was killed, preferring to die rather than face the dishonour of retreating.

As for your squad mates, they won't actually be killed but can be incapacitated during a mission and taken out by a medic to return patched up for the next battle. Medics will play a key part in proceedings, administering bandages to stem the flow of blood, something that takes time and leaves you vulnerable. You can call a medic for yourself or for a squad mate, at which point you may have to provide cover, as the Japanese show



"Sod MacArthur, I'm off to Australia."

little regard for the conventions of warfare and will happily mow the good doctor down. If it comes to it, you can even pick up a mate and carry him to the medic, although we're not convinced anyone will bother with this sort of heroics.

ASSAULT AT FAULT

As valuable as all these new features are, we'd be lying if we said we didn't have one or two concerns about *Pacific Assault*. Principal among these is that it will appear a bit tame in comparison to the magnificent *Call Of Duty* (reviewed page 80), which has now seriously raised the bar for war-based shooters. Not only this, but many of the levels seem a bit linear, which was excusable in the villages and trenches of *Allied Assault*, but is considerably less so in the open jungle terrain of the Pacific theatre.

Matt Powers attempts to allay our fears: "Really, what it comes down to is *Medal Of Honor* is about the war and about one man's journey in the war. But it's about the quality of the gameplay, and we can translate that quality to any game we make. The Pacific theatre should be just as good as the European theatre."

Either way, *Pacific Assault* looks like a decent stab at evolving the brilliant *Medal Of Honor* franchise, and the far Eastern setting should keep things reasonably fresh. Good old WWII – just keeps on giving. [A]



Not the best place to drop your keys.

immediately. Of course it doesn't really, although that would be highly amusing. Instead, you face two hard years of brutal war, which if it doesn't kill you, will make a man of you, something that will actually be physically represented in the game. As part of a four-man squad, you'll actually be able to witness your buddies age, as their fresh young skin is ravaged by the horrors of war. Also, bandages may appear as appropriate, and they can even permanently lose a tooth.

This isn't an area that EALA has entered into lightly, and their location has helped them to employ the services of some of Hollywood's leading digital artists, with experience on films such as *Shrek*, *Aladdin* and *Spider-Man*. Their

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Stansted takes a beating.



Flight sims are pretty thin in the skies, but this looks like a good 'un.



"No! You can be my wingman!"



Ohh. Don't you miss the cold war?

Yankee Doodle Floppy Disc...

LOCK ON: MODERN AIR COMBAT

Daniel Emery requests landing clearance for another top-notch Russian flight sim...

THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER Ubisoft
DEVELOPER Eagle Dynamics
ETA December 5
WEBSITE www.lo-mac.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- From the Russian developers who made the groundbreaking *Flanker*
- Accurate flight dynamics, tip-top weapons and a realistic environment
- 36 single missions, each with its own background and story
- Three NATO and five Russian jets to fly

WE HAVEN'T heard much from Russian developer Eagle Dynamics lately, not since the utterly fantastic *SU 27 Flanker 2* was launched four years ago. But the pioneering developer has finally come back with a corker – *Lock On: Modern Air Combat*.

The developers have stuck to their tried and tested format – modern jet combat over Russia, this time between

the former USSR and NATO – and old *Flanker* players will spot three identical aircraft from the series: the German MiG-29A, Russian MiG-29A, and MiG-29C along with the SU's themselves: the SU-25 Frogfoot, SU-27 Flanker B and SU-33 Flanker D. There are, however, two new aircraft. The American fighter F-15C Eagle and the much loved, but very ugly A-10A Thunderbolt II tank buster (better known as the Warthog).

FOXTROT ZULU MILKSHAKE

The game is a high-end sim for the seriously hardcore flight simmer, with over 200 different options and commands as your disposal. But if this appears a tad overwhelming (and it can be) then the game can be scaled down for the most humble novice and still be lots of fun.

Graphically it's good – on a par with the high standards set by *IL-2 Sturmovik*. However, as most modern jet fighters tend to use 'stand-off' weapons (ie air-to-air missiles), it's not often you get really up close and personal with other aircraft.

This is a shame, as all the craft have been done to a high standard.

Ground objects – ships, tanks, buildings etc – also look great, and the water effects are top-notch, although you'll need a reasonable PC, a good 3D card and lots of RAM to really crank the graphics up.

FLYING COLOURS

The developers have made full good of 3D effects, with cannon fire leaving wispy trails of smoke that don't look like the 'black candyfloss' seen in other games. Fires from burning tanks look, well, like a

unique brief, goal and hostile targets, and some of them are very tricky. Not only is the enemy AI pretty smart but each aircraft has its own unique set of benefits and flaws. For example, the tank-busting Warthog can take a huge amount of enemy fire and still keep moving, while the sleek F-15C Eagle drops like a brick when hit by a bit of stray shrapnel. Of course, you can always run away in your F-15 – an option not readily available to the slow-moving A-10A.

Based on the code we've been playing, *Lock On* looks good and plays great. The only question mark lies over

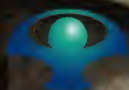
"Each mission has a unique brief, goal and hostile targets – some very tricky"

tank on fire, and hitting the afterburners will create a heat haze. Either that, or my monitor's packing up.

The maps within the game are fairly diverse, with around 36 different missions within the game. Each mission has a

the genre itself. Until recently, the flight sim market was DOA. Can *Lock On* do for the modern combat flight sim what *IL-2* did for WWII dog fighting? Probably not, but at least it shows there's life in the old birds yet. [A]

it's about making your enemies die for theirs.



GATHERING

www.hidden-and-dangerous.com



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REVIEWS

THE DEFINITIVE LOWDOWN ON ALL THE LATEST PC GAMES

CRACKER



■ SENIOR REVIEWS ED Martin Korda

▲ So, how did I do? In my prediction of what games would show up for review this month, that is? Well, it would seem that my barely adequate powers of prediction have, by some miracle, proved pretty much spot on. Either that or publishers are so desperate to get their games out in time for the Christmas rush, they couldn't afford to prove me wrong.

The two notable absentees are *Half-Life 2* and *Unreal Tournament 2004*, both of which we hope, but can't promise, to review next issue. But even without these two super-heavyweights adding their substantial girth to the PC ZONE review scales, this month's line-up is still weightier than a lift full of sumo wrestlers, wearing lead shoes and having just eaten an entire cow. Each.

And with a line-up this good, it's little surprise that we've awarded a staggering three, yes count 'em, three PC ZONE Classics this month. But which games are deserving of the most-coveted award in the PC gaming magazine industry? *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time* perhaps? *Hidden & Dangerous 2*? *Max Payne 2: The Fall Of Max Payne*? *Tortuga: Pirates Of The New World*? OK, now I'm just being ridiculous. As if *Max Payne 2* is going to warrant a Classic award...

We've also got a few titanic head to heads. *FIFA Football 2004* faces off against *Pro Evolution Soccer 3*, while *C&C: Generals - Zero Hour* goes eyeball to eyeball with *Age Of Mythology: The Titans*.

On a slightly different note, I'd just like to say what a great loss to the UK games industry the closures of Lost Toys and Computer Artworks will be, and we at PC ZONE wish all of their employees the very best and hope to see them all involved in creating great PC games again in the near future. Have a great Christmas all.



Will *Prince Of Persia* be a prince or a pauper among games? Check out our exclusive review on page 58 to find out.

THE ZONE SCORING SYSTEM

Some people (mainly games publishers) say that our scoring system is harsh. It's not. It's honest and built around the seemingly outdated idea that 50 per cent is an average score. Likewise, 70 per cent is a good score, anything above 80 per cent is excellent, and 90 per cent and above is a Classic (see below). Talking of Classic awards, don't expect to see one every issue as we don't chuck them around like confetti.

OUR REVIEWERS

We think our reviewers are the best in the business. Each one is a specialist in numerous genres and will have played every major release, so no game is judged in isolation. We also make sure the right game gets

reviewed by the right person, which means you won't see Steve Hill reviewing an RPG and we won't let Rhianna loose on *FIFA 2003*. You can have your say on the games and our reviews as well. If you have a comment to make, please email your views to letters@pczone.co.uk and entitle your email 'Feedback'.

ONLINE REVIEWS AND REVIEW UPDATES

We review a lot of games before they go on sale, and if there are no public servers running before we go to print we won't second-guess how the game's going to play online. Instead, you'll find dedicated online reviews of all the major releases in our regular Update section. This is also the place where we take a fresh look at games we think have changed significantly – as is the case with persistent online games or through major patch releases.

OUR PCS

We test games on a variety of systems so we can report how they perform in the real world. All our reviewed games are played on the manufacturer's minimum specification, as well as our own top-end rig – the Area-51 from *Alienware* (below).



Only games that score 90 per cent or more receive the coveted Classic award. The best of the best.



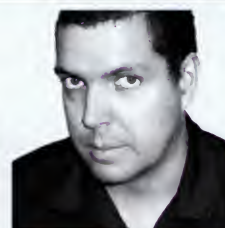
The second tier award for games scoring between 80 and 89 per cent. Essential purchases.

MEET THE TEAM



DAVE WOODS

Max Payne 2



JAMIE SEFTON

Halo: Combat Evolved multiplayer

The return to pre-decimal society

What are you currently playing?

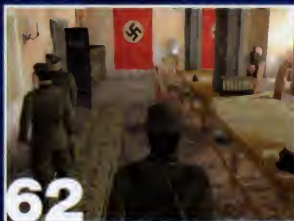
All I want for christmas is...

A Coventry City away kit



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PRINCE OF PERSIA
Long live the prince?



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HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2
The long-awaited sequel arrives



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RE-RELEASES
Older games at budget prices



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FEEDBACK
Where you air your opinions

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- 106 **RE-RELEASES**
INCLUDING BATTLEFIELD 1942: DELUXE EDITION, THE SIMS: DOUBLE DELUXE AND MANY MORE.



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80



MARTIN KORDA

Call Of Duty and Warlords IV

A robot, some Lego, play dough and a Porsche



ANTHONY HOLDEN

Prince Of Persia: Sands Of Time and Armed & Dangerous

A breakthrough in cybernetic technology, paving the way for next year's bionic eye



PAUL PRESLEY

Anarchy Online and Mafia

A Broadband connection in every home



WILL PORTER

Max Payne 2 and Broken Sword: TSD

Two packets of roast beef Monster Munch and four cans of Red Stripe lager



MARK HILL

Hidden & Dangerous 2

Sarah Michelle Gellar



STEVE HILL

A Tale In The Desert

Six points for Chester City



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

■ £34.99 | Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Ubisoft Montreal | ETA: December 5 | www.prince-of-persia.com

REQUIRES PIII 800, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Steve Hill has a royal appointment with a revitalised Prince

INPERSPECTIVE

TOMB RAIDER: THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS

Reviewed Issue 132, Score 68%

The game inspired by the original PoP still has some similarities in the form of lever-pulling puzzles and hanging off ledges.

ENTER THE MATRIX

Reviewed Issue 130, Score 72%

Running up walls, Bullet Time, the comparisons are all there. A slightly different setting though.

1989: THE Berlin Wall crumbled, Madchester was in the grip of killer rave drug E, and some college boy in America released a PC game called *Prince Of Persia*. The latter event may not have grabbed the headlines, but 14 years on the all-new *Prince* is hogging a lot of pages. Of course, he has appeared since, in 1993 for the sequel, and again in 1999 for a 3D version that history has incontrovertibly deemed 'shit'. Following the debacle that was *Prince Of Persia 3D*, it may have

been tempting to bury the licence and forget about the whole thing. Never go back, as the saying goes. Creator Jordan Mechner has done exactly that though, overseeing

band gets back together, the magic of games means that everything is shiny and new, and such are the exponential advances in technology over the past decade that it almost looks

soft-focus fairytale, in keeping with the ninth-century *Arabian Nights*-style setting. A lot of effort has clearly gone into the visual style, and if it were a film it would probably be one of

"Just finding out what you can actually do is a joy in itself – walking on walls, climbing pillars"

the development of this 21st-century incarnation.

Suffice to say, the *Prince* looks a lot better than in the original. Unlike when an old

like a different medium. Even judged by current standards, the look of *Sands Of Time* is immediately striking, and it comes across as a kind of

those cheesecake '70s *Sinbad* adventures (albeit thankfully without Martin Shaw).

As for the story, it is of a similar ilk, and involves the



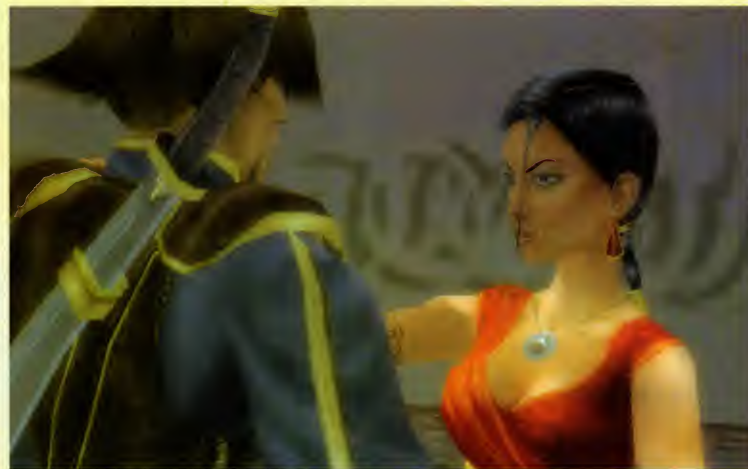
Regularly top up your dagger with the sands of time. Obviously.



"Welcome to *Changing Rooms*."



"Come on lads, can't we talk about this?"



Breasts you could sheath your sword in.



Rearranging furniture can be a strenuous task.

WALKTHROUGH →

AS EASY AS FALLING OFF A LOG

HE'S AN AGILE LAD OUR PRINCE. HERE'S A FEW MOMENTS FROM HIS DAY...



1 "Look at me! I'm casually strolling over a raging waterfall using a wet log."



2 "Shit, I've fallen. Not to worry, I'll edge my way along using my hands."



3 "What fresh hell is this? Back off, or I'll carve you to bleedin' ribbons."

titular *Prince* inadvertently unleashing the titular sands, thus destroying a kingdom and turning its entire populace into ferocious demons.

Clearly feeling a little sheepish, he sets out to rectify matters immediately, which is where you step in, easing into the action at a fairly sedate pace. This is just as well, as the control system takes some getting used to, particularly with a mouse and keyboard. Not because it's bad, but because it's so original, providing a refreshing change

from the tired platform antics of *Tomb Raider* et al.

A triumph of design, the emphasis has wisely been removed from pixel-perfect gymnastics and placed instead on a far more cerebral approach. Simply finding out what you can actually do is a joy in itself, be it walking on walls, clambering up pillars or swinging on bars like a particularly well co-ordinated chimp. It's a breath of fresh air, and elevates the game beyond the realms of a mere 3D platformer.



You'll believe a man can run along walls.

Mechner has stated that he wanted the gameplay to capture the frenetic pace of the original game, but initially this wish seems to have gone unheeded. At least the first hour of the game seems to involve being stuck up a pole wondering what to do next. What you actually do is look for another nearby column, adopt the most appropriate of four directions and attempt to leap the gap. Depending on your decision, you'll either make it or you won't, and should you miss, you'll know not to try it again, eventually working out the correct route.



Stop showing off and put your top back on.

head wound can be cured with a sip of water).

The magical sands also have other uses, and as well as reversing time they can slow it down, giving you something of an advantage over enemies during close combat. And if you think that sounds familiar, you'd be right, as it is to all intents and purposes, bullet-time, albeit without the bullets (scimitar-time doesn't quite have the same ring). Also handy in a scrap, enemies can be frozen in time, enabling you to slay them without reply.



"Anyone got a light?" Combat is a slightly unsatisfactory affair.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY (O)



My kingdom, my kingdom for a bow.

WHERE'S YOUR TOOL?

The combat sections mainly consist of a bunch of enemies surrounding you and attempting to club you to death while you fend them off with a sword and dagger. It would have been good to have some kind of range weapon to give you a bit of breathing space. We're not suggesting a rocket launcher, but maybe a bow and arrow like that used by the sultry Farah.

Hardly twitch gameplay then, but as the action unfolds your manual dexterity is tested as well as your mind, and you are made to approach the game with a degree of gusto. Effectively timed sections appear, forcing you to put your skills into practice without having all day to think about it. So, for instance, a pressure panel will open a distant door, giving you about 20 seconds to scarper up a wall, avoid a spinning blade, leap on to a ledge, hurdle a chasm and throw yourself through the door just as it slams behind you.

RE-RE-RE-WIND

So far, so *Indiana Jones* (the film, not the game), but once you get your confidence it's done in such an elegant fashion that it feels perfectly natural. And should you misjudge a move and hurtle

towards imminent death, you can make like Cher and turn back time. Yep, the mystical sands of time allow you to do just that, as stabbing the R key enables you to rewind the action to the point just before you cocked up, replete with wibbly-wobbly visual effects.

You can't do it indefinitely, as the sands eventually run out and have to be replenished, but while your magic dagger is full of magic sand, it's a very useful tool to have. In real terms, it's little more than a glorified quicksave, but one that maintains the sense of immersion, something that has clearly been uppermost in the game's design.

For example, health is restored by drinking water as opposed to finding an arbitrary health pack, again maintaining the integrity of the universe (or at least to the extent that a gushing

ARABIAN FIGHTS

As for the fighting, although you can sometimes run away from nasties, you will eventually have to get stuck in, using the game's much-vaunted multi-directional combat. What this means is that when surrounded by a slew of enemies, you can switch between them and lock on to one while lashing out with your sword. It's not really that big a deal – particularly with the keyboard – and the combat isn't particularly satisfying. Demons have to first be lacerated into submission with your sword, and then swiftly finished off with the Dagger of Time lest they rise again.

In a one-on-one situation, this presents no problem, but with three or four it becomes something of a crowd scene, and your path to the stricken demon is often blocked. Also, due to the fact that the Prince locks on to an enemy, if you need to back off to replenish your health, you have to first



Use the remote camera to help solve mind-bending puzzles.

put away your weapons, thus leaving yourself vulnerable.

On the plus side, you can use your sword at any time, even when climbing a ladder or hanging off a bar. This adds to the perceived reality and comes in handy when hanging off a branch attempting to ward off a flock of killer birds, for instance. Or maybe they were bats.

Prince Of Persia was of course all about traps, with instant death meted out in a number of gruesome ways.

They certainly haven't been overlooked here, and the vast palace in which the game takes place is full of them, at times resembling some kind of medieval torture chamber.

SPIKED JINX

Among the devious devices is an homage to the original in the form of the famous spikes, either lurking in a pit or ready to spring from the ground should you put a foot out of place. With all manner of hardware flying about,

you do need to be on your toes, and the prince is well equipped, able to roll like a gymnast, aided by some excellent animation.

As a change of pace, puzzles are liberally scattered through the game, and require a reasonable level of thought. If you don't enjoy thinking (and who does?)

the way, you'll meet a few characters, including the token female interest in the form of Princess Farah, who seems keen but may have dubious motives. That said, the Prince is a good-looking guy, particularly when he loses his shirt, and it has been suggested in some quarters that

"A near-seamless gaming experience... Ubisoft has kissed a frog and it's turned into a prince"

they can prove frustrating as you haplessly wade in, randomly pulling levers and getting nowhere before actually stopping to think about the task in hand, with better perspective generally offered by the special panned out camera view.

It's a big old palace in which you're roaming around, and it's a reasonably big old game. Along

he's the male equivalent of Lara Croft, providing a bit of titillation for the ladies.

FORMERLY KNOWN AS WINCE

Either way, he's back in a large fashion, and *Sands Of Time* is a highly original game (although the similarity to the PS2's *ICO* have been pointed out). It's not

perfect, but there are enough fresh ideas to go some way towards re-establishing your faith in the genre. That said, simply categorising it as a platformer-turned-action adventure doesn't really do it justice, as it manages to transcend lazy pigeonholing to deliver a near seamless gaming experience.

If anything, it's a tad earnest in places, although this is

perversely offset by some dismal attempts at humour. These are minor details though, and the real value is to be found in the sparkling gameplay and lavish environments. Expectations have been high since the game's award-winning E3 appearance, and they have largely been met. Ubisoft has kissed a frog and it's turned into a prince. **PCZ**

ONE VISION

FLASHBACKS IN REVERSE

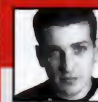
Whenever you reach one of the game's save points, you are also presented with a vision of the future (it's powerful stuff that sand). Essentially murky black and white footage of the game's next section, if you watch closely it does offer some clues as to how you should approach it.



Watch carefully. This is what your future holds.



Well you would, wouldn't you?



SECOND OPINION

ANTHONY HOLDEN

I haven't been able to shut up about this game since E3. Even then, it showed every chance of becoming one of my top games of the year, as the genre and gameplay couldn't be much further up my alley without featuring giant pandas and karate-kicking schoolgirls. As it turns out, I do like it rather a lot, but maybe not quite as much as expected. I agree with Steve about the voice acting and story, which are average at best. On the other hand, I actually enjoy the combat, repetitive though it is, and I feel that he has underrated the game slightly. For my money, the brilliant atmosphere, fluid acrobatics and other innovations make this a borderline Classic, and I think anyone who shares my liking for slick, intelligent action/adventures will agree.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Stunning graphics
- ✓ Fluid animation
- ✓ Seamless gameplay
- ✗ Unsatisfying combat
- ✗ Hammy voice acting
- ✗ Occasional camera issues

84

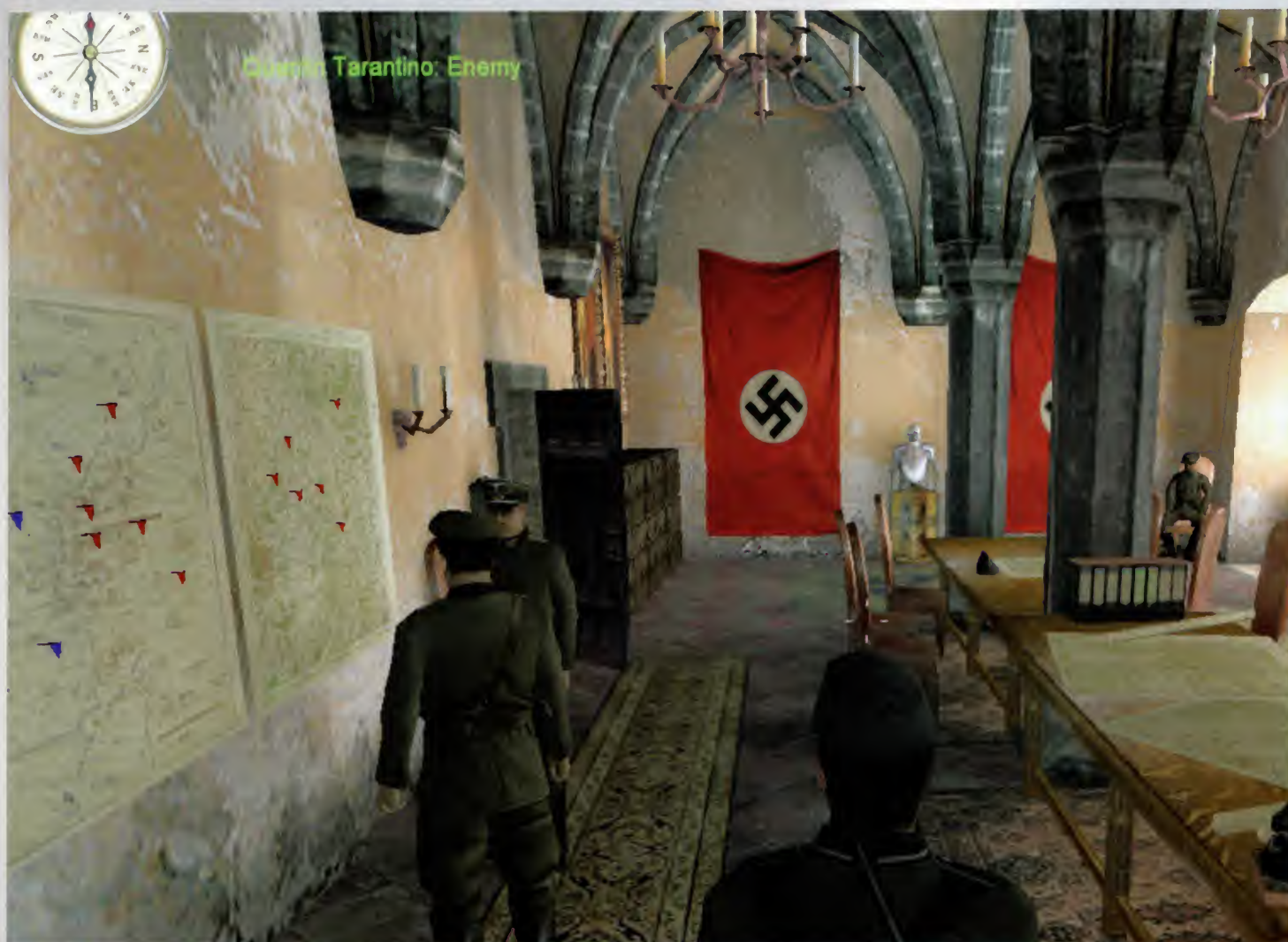
The *Prince Of Persia 3D* we always wanted

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2

■ £34.99 | Pub: Illusion Softworks | Dev: Gathering | ETA: Out Now | www.hidden-and-dangerous.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Mark Hill arms himself with a sniper rifle and a can of bug spray for this hot new tactical shooter



Bugged, but brilliant.



INPERSPECTIVE

GHOST RECON

Reviewed Issue 110, Score 86%

Great squad-based war shooter from Red Storm. The tiny tactical command screen is more to my liking than *H&D2*'s, but for everything else it's second best.

MAFIA

Reviewed Issue 119, Score 93%

Illusion's previous masterpiece. After looking at the credits for both games and seeing little correspondence, I can only hope the *Mafia* team is hard at work on something just as good as this.



First-person view is preferable for combat.

IT WASN'T looking good for Sergeant Lynch. He'd been sent by his cowardly teammates to plant a mine right under the nose of a Nazi Panzer, there was sand in his boxer shorts and blood in his mouth. But they were never going to complete the level with that hunk of metal in the way, and Lieutenant Tarantino's hand had been bitten by some desert bug, rendering him incapable of crawling right up to the tank and laying a deathtrap. Testicles still lodged in the upper part of his throat, Sergeant Lynch completed his glorious task and shimied back to his colleagues.

"The tank's not moving," said Sergeant Faulkner. "Bugger," said Lynch. The other sergeant got his sniper rifle out, spat into the sand and aimed at the foot of the tank. Several shots later, the mine lay unexploded and the

Some indoor scenes are pure *Mafia*.

You don't fly the plane, but you do get to shoot them down.



Where do you think you're going, eh?

Panzer was still sitting pretty. "Hello, chaps," said Sergeant Whedon, arriving from his infiltration of a nearby warehouse. "Look what I found." He laid two bazookas at their feet like a dog with a pair of slobbered slippers. "Blimey,"

yes, you read right, high difficulty and bugs are still present, though not as rampantly as in the original.

This sequel has been in the works for years, so it's a real shame that it's been released in a less than fully polished state:

to shoot and even a crash or two. Illusion is already hard at work on a patch (which may already be out by the time you read this), but it's surely the publisher who's to blame. Why not wait till Christmas to release it, unless it's because *Half-Life 2*



Soldiers like their penis substitutes.

PLEASE DON'T DIE

Still, as I said, the bugs are nowhere near as terminal as those in the first *H&D*, and the game is so hugely enjoyable that we want to forgive it and hope the patch fixes all.

H&D2 uses the same engine that powered *Mafia*, the most criminally underrated shooter of the past few years. It has

the same attention to detail and the same gripping firefights, though it looks considerably better and, on some levels, nothing short of stunning.

Once again, you choose a squad of four from a large pool of soldiers, each with their own strength, endurance and skills in shooting, stealth, first aid and lock picking. A very nice touch,

"With only one save slot, your 14th attempt may be successful but your medic is a corpse"

said Lynch. But who was going to get close enough to stick one up the Hun's backside?

guns and characters floating, soldiers getting stuck in the scenery, suddenly not being able

had been delayed and they spotted a hole in the market? Who knows?

BUG'S OWN

It's moments like these, totally unscripted and unpredictable, that make *Hidden & Dangerous 2* an absolute joy to play. Or at least it is when you're not frothing with rage and frustration at a seemingly impossible assignment or a badly timed bug.

OK, so you'll have to add in your own pedestrian bits of dialogue, but the between-mission cut-scenes give your soldiers enough of a Boy's Own feel to last you a good while. And

TACTICAL SHOOTER SUPERTEST

A ZONE PHOTOSHOOT?

Take a closer look at that box cover. Doesn't it look just like one of those silly dressing-up photos we used to parade ourselves in for a supertest? I recognise the aching joints from trying out dozens of poses. The "what do you mean, let's try something different" look in the eyes. The quiet pride at holding a weapon ("look it's not just a replica"). The fact that none of them look like soldiers. And, most of all, that the one in the middle is Keith Pullin's doppelganger. So, come clean Keith. You missed those photoshoots, didn't you? You just couldn't stay away from the bright lights and flashing bulbs. And now your face is the icon on the desktop I click every time I play *Hidden & Dangerous 2*.



Clearly we're not paying Keith enough.



Bobsledding with a twist.

so simple yet rarely used by developers, is that you can rename your SAS members (hence my crack team of film directors and novelists). This, coupled with the way their stats improve after each mission, lets you get close to your team and feel their death as a real loss.

And sometimes you will have to make sacrifices. Because most missions are so tough and because you only have one save slot (which you can overwrite whenever you like), you may find that your 14th attempt is successful, but that your best medic is a bloody corpse. Not that you can afford to lose too many men. Your group of four has to last for the duration of each campaign before you can bring in new faces.

A WAIL IN THE DESERT

While you will die a lot and swear your lungs out more, even the most difficult situations can usually be solved by clever and tactical thinking. Illusion never resorts to making the enemies infallible or outrageously

numbered. The one exception is a mission in which you have to cross the desert. There are planes flying above ready to shoot you down if you get out of your jeep, and halfway through the path (from which you can't stray due to the numerous mines outside it) you encounter a tank that chases you as you try to backtrack and blows you to hell. Finding missiles and then managing to get close enough to fire at the tank without it seeing you first (nowhere to hide in a desert) or the planes mowing you down, is exasperating beyond words.

"Multiplayer looks great and some of the maps could offer really classic online moments"

And then one of my men would decide to waste a precious missile firing at a plane and I would have to start again. As you may have guessed, the AI is not without hitches. A lot of the time your team does exactly what you tell them to (follow, attack, hold position, lay



Man versus machine. Sodding machine usually wins.

down covering fire etc), often sees and kills enemies before you know what's going on and even tells you when you're in their line of fire. Other times they'll shoot when you've told them not to or walk when you want them to run.

The enemy can be erratic too. Sometimes they act completely human, missing the target if startled, retreating and surrendering. Other times they fail to hear gunfire or can home in on your head through thick vegetation. No doubt some of these issues are bugs, and will hopefully be sorted soon.

add to the incredible variety on offer though. The environments are startlingly different, from the stark African dunes to dense Burmese jungles (so, so much better than *Vietcong's*), from beautiful icebergs to awe-inspiring Austrian hills. These are so beautiful in fact, that the Austrian tourist board might want to use them for promotional purposes. Though they might want to edit out the bloodthirsty Nazis.

The gameplay is just as varied: stealth missions, full-on assaults, scuba-diving and even a great defend-the-oasis-fortress-in-the-desert level.



SECOND OPINION

COLONEL KORDA

For all the superlatives poured on the original, I found it hard to be patient with a game in which keeping your troops alive was only marginally harder than making sure they didn't fall through the Earth or crawl five feet above the ground. However, in *H&D2* Illusion has crafted a beautifully addictive game.

It's as hard as a concrete-coated Glaswegian, but is so addictive you won't care. And it's nice to be able to employ tactics once in a while instead of simply wading into the fray. You can even play the whole thing as an RTS, though I wouldn't recommend it.

The huge variety of levels and challenges puts this up at the top of WWII games, alongside *Medal Of Honor* and *Commandos 2*, and once a patch arrives, it's going to be even better.

talent for spotting non-Nazi behaviour or a non-issue knife is a little over the top).

Multiplayer looks great too (Illusion promises it's less buggy) and some of the maps could offer truly classic online moments. We'll have to wait until the servers are up and running to test them fully though, something we'll be doing in a future issue. There won't be any vehicles online, which are so much fun in single-player, because apparently they'd end up unbalancing these maps. You already have *Battlefield 1942* for that anyway.

It's just a shame *H&D2* wasn't released in a more polished and bug-free state. If that had happened, and the tactical screen had proved more useful, we'd be looking at a full-on classic. It's still a must for anyone looking for a real challenge though. It's a worthy WWII companion to *Mafia*, and the best tactical shooter available. Tally-ho! **B+**

MISSED OPPORTUNITY (O)



Sadly, you can't play through the campaign cooperatively.

CO-OPTED OUT

Apart from not releasing it in a more polished state, the biggest disappointment is the lack of a co-op mode. Playing through the whole campaign with a bunch of friends would surely have been a blast (though it's true some missions require just one soldier). If I had my choice, I'd do away with all tanks too. They're flamin' annoying buggers.

To help you cope with some of the harder missions, you can bring up a top-down 3D RTS display, where you can set waypoints, stance and speed. It's sometimes hard to get them to do exactly what you had in mind though, and I would have preferred more options, like covering a particular area. Others will make more use of this screen than me. I preferred to scout ahead with my sniper and then bring the rest over when needed, only occasionally using the tactical display to outflank enemies.

You can actually play through the whole game in Lone Wolf mode but, as you can imagine, the difficulty is multiplied. It does

And each requires a very different tactical approach.

The attention to realism draws you in completely (until one of those bugs comes along), with weight restrictions, scope drift, and the ability to shoot through canvas or wooden walls. You also get out of breath if you run too much. As if I didn't get enough of that in real life.

ALL DRESSED UP

Donning a disguise is just as realistic: the uniform has to be taken from a surrendered soldier so there's no bullet-holes or blood stains. All exposed weaponry has to be bona fide too (although the AI's



The tactical display is very useful to pause and assess things.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Riveting and varied gameplay
- ✓ Some stunning scenery
- ✓ Attention to detail
- ✗ Too many bugs
- ✗ Iffy tactical screen
- ✗ Those bloody tanks

88

Just short of genius

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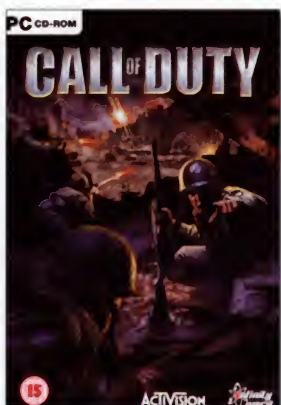
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Code: RM00559



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OUT: 14 Nov
ASP £29.99 **£24.99**
Code: RM00339



Pro Evolution Soccer 3
OUT NOW
ASP £29.99 **£22.99**
Code: RM00750



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OUT NOW
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Code: RM00426



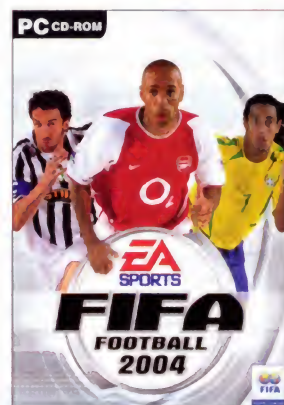
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PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3



£29.99 | Pub: Konami | Dev: Konami | ETA: November 7 | www.konami.com

REQUIRES PIII 800, 128MB RAM and an NVIDIA GeForce 3, ATI Radeon 8500 or equivalent 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.4GHz, 256MB RAM and an NVIDIA GeForce 4 or ATI Radeon 9600 3D card

Steve Hill gets off his sofa and sits in front of his PC, but the fun remains the same

NOW THEN. Regular readers may have noticed that we're always banging on about *Pro Evolution Soccer*. We literally won't shut up about it, except when we're actually playing it, which is all the time. Countless games have come and gone, sparked briefly only to be dropped like hot shit in favour of the next big thing. Not so PES, which has outlasted the lot, managing to reduce grown men

to foul-mouthed apes on a daily basis. We simply can't get enough of it. And it's not even a PC game, meaning that we often have to scuffle with the staff of sister-mag CVG in order to get hold of a PS2 to play it.

Not any more. *Pro Evolution* is coming to the PC, which if nothing else will at least make for more civilised behaviour in the office. Not that I care. I work from home. If I want to play PES, it involves little more than getting up, walking into the next room and bedding in on the sofa for an hour. Or two. Or four. This minor inconvenience has now been removed from my life, as I am now but a mouse-click away from the wonderful world of *Pro Evolution Soccer 3*. Which is a very good thing. It's also a very bad thing, as the temptation to spend all night playing football



INPERSPECTIVE

FIFA FOOTBALL 2004

Reviewed Issue 136, Score 81%

High production values can't mask the fact the gameplay simply isn't a patch on PES3. See page 68.

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4

Reviewed Issue 128, Score 90%

All numbers and words, but an equally impressive recreation of the wonderful world of football.



Who's been tearing our screenshot?



Monaco's Louis II stadium, on top of a car park.



"Emile, that rectangular white thing is called a goal."



Comprehensive replays let you gloat again and again.

rather than writing this review may prove too much.

THIS IS FOOTBALL

So what's so life-sappingly good about the game? Well, it's probably easier to examine what's bad about it. Gameplay-wise, almost nothing. Japan may not have a long history of football, but it seems that the Konami development team has scientifically studied the



It might be worth a pop if Seaman were in goal.

"This is as close as you'll get without actually being one of the players"

sport and somehow magicked it on to a shiny disc. They've managed to perfectly distil the excitement, passion, subtlety and frustration of the world's favourite sport. Reviewing the game is almost like reviewing the sport, so closely does it mirror its real-life counterpart. As such, it's utterly enthralling.

Ultimately, the realism comes down to the movement of the ball and the players – well there's nothing else really, is there? First up, the ball physics are near perfect. Gravity appears to be based on that experienced on Earth, and the bounce is that of a

well-pumped leather sphere. It's the latter aspect that makes for many of the game's more heart-stopping moments, with the ball ping-pong around the penalty area for some truly breathless goalmouth scrambles.

FOOTBALLER'S LIVES

As for the players, it's no exaggeration to say that the animation is among the best in any game, sports or otherwise. Simply put, the players move like footballers. Not just any generic footballers though, but the actual footballers that they represent. Allied to each player's 30

different stats and 17 special skills, this is as close as you'll get without actually being one of the players. It works phenomenally well, and the players' individual attributes shape the way you approach each match.

In the England squad, for instance, Beckham is bereft of pace but blessed with pinpoint passing, Heskey is a lumbering oaf who occasionally gets on the end of things, Owen is nippy and Dyer is more than capable of roasting the best of them. In terms of gameplay then, PES3 is unsurpassed. There is also a

BECOME THE MASTER

WE'RE GONNA WIN THE LEAGUE...

As any fool knows, football games are best played between bitter human beings. Failing that, PES3 offers an array of cups for which the solitary man can compete. However, for the serial loner with an inordinate amount of spare time, the Master League is where it's at. Taking control of a team of talentless mules, the transfer market must be carefully pruned, enabling you to gradually turn around your fortunes and surge through the divisions. It's painstaking to start with, but once things get going, you could easily spend the entire winter building up your team. Warn your girlfriends.

Team information										
Merseyside Blue		Win ave			Consec wins					
LT	RT	Pt	W	D	L	GF	GA	Y	R	
		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Members										
1	GK Ivarov	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	CBT Stremer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	CBT Dulic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
4	CBT Valeny	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
5	DMF Iouga	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
6	DMF Celnil	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
7	SMF Ximelez	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
8	SMF Espimas	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
10	DMF Minanda	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
9	CF Castolo	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
11	CF Barola	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Football game-meets-RPG in the Master League.

wealth of tactical options – such as on-the-fly strategy changes and man marking – many of which you could easily never use.

NAME GAME

The only criticism that can be levelled at the game is in the periphery. Due to absurd legal reasons, club names cannot be used, meaning that ludicrous approximations are used instead, with Everton appearing as Merseyside Blues for instance. Certain player names are also bastardised, but the good news is that with the game debuting on PC, it is surely only a matter of time before somebody releases a patch rectifying everything.

It's worth pointing out that PES3 is simply a straight PS2 conversion, with no concession to PC gamers in terms of LAN or online play. In fact the only tangible difference is the increased resolution, which is in itself like having your eyes cleaned. As a PS2 game, it is of

course designed for a PS2 pad, and while it's just about playable with a Sidewinder, you're not getting the full experience. So get yourself a PS2 pad adapter.

The fact that the game almost effortlessly overcomes these drawbacks is testament to the exquisite gameplay though, and PES3 is as close to football as any game has ever come. If you have any interest in the sport, or just in games, you can't allow yourself to miss this game. **PC**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Phenomenal gameplay
- ✓ Immaculate animation
- ✓ In-depth tactics
- ✓ Crisp graphics
- ✗ Needs a PS2 pad
- ✗ No LAN or online play

90

The Beautiful Game



Come on lads, get a room.



Owen outpaces the flat-footed Welsh defence.



Cheer up lads, you're playing for England.



Back of the net! Hopefully.



The Battle Of Old Trafford continues.



"Are you looking at me?"



A terrifying close-up of the Salford Terrier.



Third division teams play in generic (shit) stadiums.

FIFA FOOTBALL 2004

■ £29.99 | Pub: EA | Dev: EA Canada | ETA: November 11 | www.ea.com

REQUIRES PIII 600, 64MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 800, 128MB RAM, 64MB 3D card, a 56K modem and a dual analogue joypad

Indoor football expert **Steve Hill** digs in for another season

THE NIGHTS are drawing in and there are six months of bleak, cold darkness to look forward to. Which can only mean one thing: the annual instalment of *FIFA* dropping gently on to the doormat. Such an inevitable fixture in the gaming calendar, a *FIFA* game not turning up every year would be like Christmas being cancelled. It's here though, and whatever is written below, it will be crammed into thousands of stockings come the big day. So will there be tears of joy or sorrow as the package is eagerly torn apart? Depends on what you asked for, really.

If you asked for *Pro Evolution Soccer 3*, it might be worth keeping hold of the receipt. It has become traditional in *FIFA*

reviews to point out how superior *PES* is, and equally traditional to receive a call from an irate PR person crying that we're comparing it (unfavourably) to a PS2 game. Not any more. With *PES3* now available on PC (reviewed page 68), the goalposts have moved.

STADIUMS ROCK

EA hasn't been caught napping though, and *FIFA 2004* sees an

and was actually suggested by yours truly when I met with the developers earlier this year.

Also new to the party is an extensive five-year career mode, with a rudimentary transfer system, enabling you to take your team to glory, or – if you're shit – get the sack. And the big one: online play, with organised tournaments and prizes up for grabs (we'll be reviewing this separately in a future issue).

ours it vibrated like an errant sex toy). Surely some kind of bundle is in order.

This (major) issue aside, *FIFA 2004* is arguably the best version yet, given greater longevity by the deeper gameplay, career mode and online options. As slick as ever (the music alone is worth a tenner), it's another quality product from EA Sports. Not as good as *PES3* though. **[B+]**

"FIFA 2004 sees an all-out assault on its rival, excelling in areas *PES3* can't go"

all-out assault on its rival, excelling in areas where *PES3* can't go. Through the *FIFA* licence, EA effectively owns football, and as such can include player names, likenesses, kits, stadiums, the lot. And while it may not make a great deal of difference to the gameplay, given the option any sane person would clearly choose authenticity. There are a slew of leagues from which to choose, and for the first time the English lower divisions are included. This is a brilliant idea,

As for the gameplay, it's a more measured affair than in previous instalments, with subtleties becoming apparent over time. The big new thing is the off-the-ball system, which is all very well, but only properly usable with a dual analogue pad, something of a kick in the face to PC gamers.

Clearly a console game at heart, this also applies to the new jostling mode, and to get the most out of the game, you really need a PS2 pad adapter (although when we connected



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Career mode
- ✓ Online play
- ✓ Absurdly slick
- ✗ Needs dual analogue pad
- ✗ Dodgy set pieces
- ✗ Shit interface

81

The PC's second-best football game

INPERSPECTIVE

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3

Reviewed Issue 136, Score 90%

Turn back to page 66 for a review of the PC's best-ever football game.

NHL 2004

Reviewed Issue 134, Score 82%

The hottest ice hockey game on the PC. Pure shin-smashing joy.

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PC CD-ROM



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Using the right battle tactics, you'll emerge with all your limbs.



The inside locations are detailed, but there's not much to loot.

THE TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL

■ £29.99 | Pub: Atari | Dev: Troika Games |
ETA: Out Now | www.greyhawkgame.com

REQUIRES PIII 700, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D Card
DESIRES P4 1.7Ghz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D Card

Rhianna Pratchett grabs a brolly and and prepares to do battle with the elements in this D&D RPG...

INPERSPECTIVE

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

Reviewed Issue 118, Score 91%
D&D in 3D. A great single-player campaign, multiplayer, editor and a DM client make this a great all-round package, plus there's lots of help for newbies.

DIVINE DIVINITY

Reviewed Issue 121, Score 85%
Although it's not based on D&D rules, *Divine Divinity* contains a huge adventure that's a cross between *Baldur's Gate* and the *Ultima* series, with the best-looking isometric engine around.

THE DUNGEONS

& Dragon world has always provided a lot of shake'n'bake potential for creating computer games. All the elements are there for a standard RPG adventure, it just requires the appropriate bindings to take it off the paper and on to the screen. Although Bioware might have taken a box of standard D&D Victoria sponge and somehow managed to turn it into a triple chocolate fudge cake with their hugely successful *Baldur's Gate* series, not all developers can

bake up an RPG as well as these lads can.

Troika Games has had a fare stab at emulating Bioware's winning recipe with *The Temple Of Elemental Evil*, which uses the new 3.5 edition rule set in a party-based adventure. D&D fans, start getting excited now.

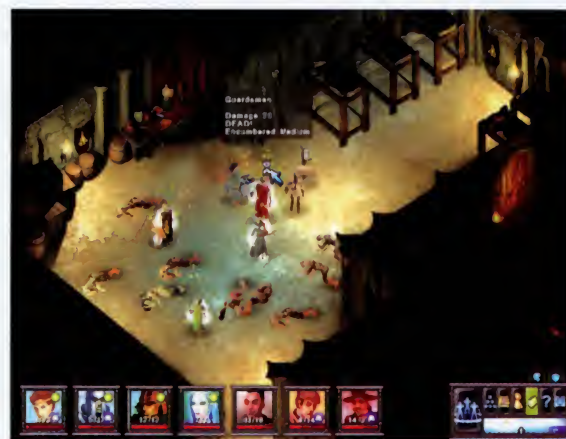
CREEPY CRAWLY

Let's get one thing straight. This isn't an 'epic' role-playing game. In fact it doesn't have many locations, and the ones it does have could have been taken out of an identikit RPG 'village' or 'dungeon'. There are no big surprises here, and much of the game is taken up by a large dungeon crawl through the titular temple itself.

To begin with you're provided with the usual collection of village quests in which you help out a bunch of useless

squabbling locals who couldn't fight their way out of a wet paper bag. Much of the early part of the game is spent toing and froing between houses, talking to NPCs and slowly accumulating experience points.

Generally these villages are good for two things – experience points and bolstering your party numbers. You start the game with up to five characters, which you can either create yourself or choose from a respectable



Let the bodies hit the floor.



What RPG could be complete without zombies?

“Fortunately, this lack of party atmosphere is eased by a nice-looking isometric engine”

pre-prepared pool. Your chosen alignment has a bearing on the characters you have access to, both in the initial party creation

screen and later on in the game. The NPCs you encounter in the game are a chatty bunch, right up until they join your party, at

which point – save for a few perfunctory comments when entering new levels – they are silent. They also get a bit stropky



If you don't know your D&D, this is just a long list of babble.



There's a pirate village to explore. Whoopie!

NO, AFTER YOU

WAIT YOUR TURN LIKE A GOOD ADVENTURER

Those who grew up on pen and paper role-playing will find the combat system in *The Temple Of Elemental Evil* reassuringly familiar. However, those whose experience of D&D just extends to the Bioware games may feel a little out of their depth. But it's worth delving into the manual because the combat system is one of the best parts of the game.

When you enter a battle, your comrades and enemies will form an orderly battle queue in the best – although not very realistic – traditions of turn-based combat. Through your characters' menu system, you can choose your method of attack (which will often depend on the kind of enemy you're fighting). You can also swap their weapon combos.

This works extremely well, allowing you to focus on your individual character's attacks, use them as a team and protect your weaker party members all in one fell swoop, which is essential, as the enemy will often try and target your weakest member first. Bastards.



The combat system is one of the game's strongest features.

when you try to sell their things. Fortunately, this lack of a party atmosphere is eased slightly by a nice-looking isometric engine and a great soundtrack.

FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHT

Also of note is the excellent combat system (see boxout). Even if you're not used to turn-based combat in an RPG, you'll find that under all the complexity, it works surprisingly well.

However, a great combat system doesn't make a great game and there are plenty of niggles too. Faithful adoption of the D&D rules is fair enough, but you can't help but feel it's too inaccessible for non D&D fans. There's a distinct lack of information about the weapons

and spells, and it would definitely have benefited from something akin to the 'Recommended' button in *Neverwinter Nights*.

Matters aren't helped by the multitude of bugs and annoying issues either, such as monsters spawning in walls and dodgy AI path-finding, which can suddenly leave half your group stranded down a corridor. None of these are hugely detrimental to the gameplay, but they do make it feel rather rough around the edges.

Hardcore D&D fans will get some enjoyment out of *TOEE*, especially the battles, but lack of information, party interaction and bugs mean that it's a rather unappealing and inaccessible prospect for anyone who doesn't regularly use 12-sided dice. **[B-]**

PCZONE VERDICT

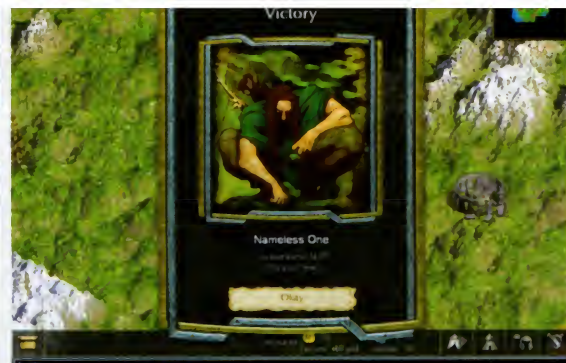
- ✓ Superb combat system
- ✓ Nice-looking engine
- ✓ Atmospheric soundtrack
- ✗ Buggy
- ✗ Requires too much prior D&D knowledge.
- ✗ Not enough in-game information

76

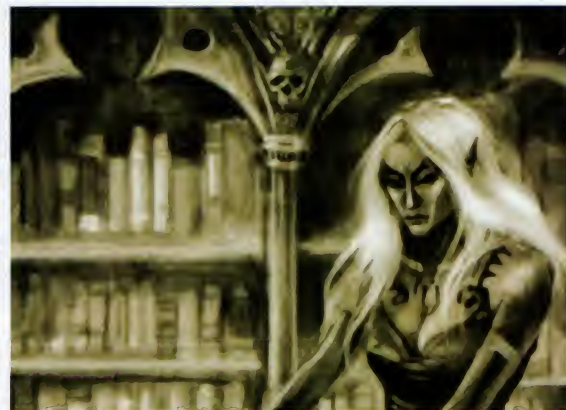
A hard nut to crack



More powerful units have special abilities that give them an edge during combat.



Clearly I still haven't got over getting my hair cut.



The cut-scene-driven story is far from pretty.

WARLORDS IV: HEROES OF ETHERIA

£29.99 | Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Infinite Interactive |

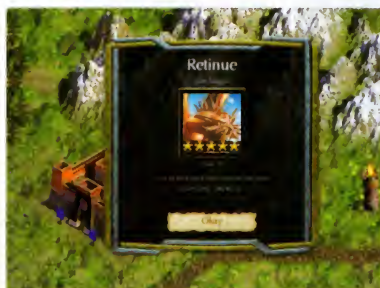
ETA: November 21 | warlords4.ubi.com

REQUIRES PIII 450, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card DESIRES A PIII 600 for smoother play

The legendary *Warlords* turn-based strategy series lives on. **Martin Korda** goes forth to see if it can still cast its magic spell over gamers...

WHAT A relief they didn't. It could have been the sell-out of the century, but thankfully, it isn't. Confused? Let me explain.

Fantasy turn-based strategy fans have always fallen into one of two camps – *Heroes Of Might And Magic* or *Warlords*. It's like choosing between Pepsi or Coke, analogue or digital, Michaela Strachan or Anneka Rice. Each has subtle yet essential differences that can sway the discerning gamer. But where the two vary most is in combat. With *HoMM* games you control every unit, moving them in and out of the action as you see fit, while *Warlords* games simply resolve each conflict for you. Only *Warlords IV* was to be different. A year ago it was shaping up to be just like *HoMM*, but thankfully



Your best units can join your retinue.



Units take turns to face off against each other.

it's stuck to its roots and saved itself from being written off as a *HoMM* rip-off. What a relief.

GOOD, BAD AND UGLY

But is it any good? Well, yes and no. Lurking beneath the smudge-like visuals masquerading as screenshots on this page (which, let's face it, look like the random doodlings of a thumbless infant) is a hybrid of classic *Warlords* gameplay and a few hit-and-miss new ideas.

The premise remains the same as ever. Conquer fortresses to expand your empire over a series of missions set in the mystical land of Etheria. Heroes rally to your cause, bringing with them a host of combat bonuses and enough spells to fill three-and-a-half magic books. Which

is quite a lot. Unless you've got tiny magic books. Obviously.

Combat is still resolved for you, taking into account each unit's strength, attack, health, bonuses and experience. However, it does come with a new twist. You now select the order in which your individuals fight, then watch as they face off against an opponent. When one carks it, another one takes their place until one side runs out of combatants. You can also choose which spells to cast if a hero unit is a part of the group. Problem is, the battles look more comical than watching a bunch of midgets slapping each other about, but at least it remains true to the *Warlords* ethos.

On a further negative point, the script is unimaginative and is

delivered by a disinterested grandad who sounds like he just wants to get it all over with before he dies.

20/20 VISION

Despite its flaws, though, there are endless hours of fun here, the intuitive gameplay sucking you in and keeping you hooked. The campaign map offers a semi-freeform path through the game, which combined with some fiendishly merciless AI (especially on higher difficulty levels) makes for a consistently challenging and entertaining experience. Although saying that, the AI on easier levels does tend to be overly passive.

However, had the graphics not been so utterly hideous, this could well have been pushing an

Essential. Why us turn-based fans have to put up with ugly games is beyond me. Wise up developers, we're not bloody blind you know. But we do know a fun game when we see one, and *Warlords IV* fits that category perfectly. 'Nuff said. **PCZ**

INPERSPECTIVE

ETHERLORDS

Reviewed Issue 112, Score 87%
Turn-based gameplay. Great graphics. Now this is more like it.

HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC IV

Reviewed Issue 115, Score 84%
If you like to be able to control your troops' actions during turn-based combat then this is your best bet.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Incredibly addictive gameplay
- ✓ Great choice of spells and units
- ✓ Faithful to the *Warlords* ethos
- ✗ Ugly as sin
- ✗ Comical-looking combat

75

Ugly, but fun

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It might be short, but it's still a candidate for Game of the Year.



MAX PAYNE 2: THE

INPERSPECTIVE

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY

Reviewed Issue 131, Score 95%
Another third-person slug-fest, but where *Max Payne* is a hard-boiled cinematic masterpiece, *Vice City* is a sprawling free-form game that you won't finish in one sitting.

XIII

Reviewed Issue 135, Score 83%
If you're a fan of comic book narrative but prefer your action in the first-person, this is an entertaining, if by-the-numbers, cel-shaded shooter.

■ £34.99 | Pub: Rockstar Games | Dev: Remedy | ETA: Out Now | www.maxpayne2.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB DirectX 9 compatible 3D card with hardware T&L support
DESIRES P4 1.7GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB DirectX 9 compatible 3D card with hardware T&L support

The tricky second album, mastered in what seems like a New York second by Dave Woods...

THINGS I like: a good film, a fine wine, the company of a salacious woman and an early night (usually in that order). Other things I like: shooting the hell out of virtual characters on screen, preferably in slow motion.

The trouble is, if someone asked me why I put Mr Payne up with the 'other things' on my wish list I'd struggle to avoid sounding like a certifiable hick: "Well, you know, ah like shooting stuff'n'shit, uh-huh..." Because, in essence, that is Max. You can dress him up in the finest anti-aliased clothing, craft a beautifully detailed story around him and even try to pass the whole thing off as 'A Film Noir Love Story', but the fact is that *Max Payne 2* is the 2003 equivalent to *Operation Wolf*.

So why the huge score? Let me try to explain. The original

was, in my humble opinion, the coolest PC game ever. I'm not saying best, I'm just saying coolest, and it's just been superseded in almost every way possible. I started playing the game at six o'clock on a Sunday evening after a heavy weekend, tired, hungover and in need of sleep. Cut forward a few hours

"Max Payne 2 is one of the tightest, most thrillingly captivating games of all time"

and I was born again, tired only of games that finish too early. Believe me when I say that *The Fall Of Max Payne* is one of the tightest, most thrillingly captivating games of all time, and like all good things in life I didn't want it to end.

It did (round about six hours after I started it), but by then I'd been sucked in and spat out by

the new Havok 2 physics engine that fully realises the cinematic scope the developers were aiming for in the original. Limbs buckle, paint pots fly off the wall, bodies arc through the air in graceful flight and boxes you'd been using for cover a few seconds earlier are blown away leaving you fully exposed

to the relentless waves of gunmen all packing bullets emblazoned with your name. Yes, this is *Max Payne*, but every element has been buffed beyond recognition and it's a thrill from start to finish.

WATCH IT!

The game still hinges on the concept of Bullet Time, the

ability to slow the action down and dive through the air piling lead into anything that moves – without it you'd be dead within minutes of firing up the game.

As with everything else in the game, Bullet Time has been polished and, dare I say, perfected, so you can Shot Dodge without expending any of

your Bullet Time, stay prone until you've finished shooting, or switch into full-on Bullet Time mode giving you time to think, focus your shots and get your body out of the way of as many bullets as you can. (And when every single bullet is rendered and coming at you from all angles you need every little advantage you can get.)



It's raining men, hallelujah, it's raining men, Amen...



Bloody hell, that was close!

FALL OF MAX PAYNE



Stand and shoot...



Snipe 'em in the head...



Or kick into Bullet Time.

Take out multiple enemies and you move into what's called 'the zone', where your enemies get slower and you remain at the same speed, giving you an even bigger edge in battles. It might not equate to a massive overhaul from the original but you'll be pleased to know the clipping problems that plagued the original have been eliminated and there are some funky new effects, like the *Matrix*-style gun reload that sees you spinning around like an extra from *The Nutcracker* before resuming the fight. And what a fight. There's only one skill level, that adjusts

PLAYING THE SAX



Can you marry computer game characters?

BEHIND EVERY GOOD MAN IS A DAMNED FINE WOMAN

I'm deliberately steering clear of ruining the story for you, but there's a brilliant narrative split about halfway through the game that lets you play as Payne's bit of fluff, Mona Sax. This is actually one of the best bits of the whole game as you make full use of the spectacular sniper rifle, trying to keep Max alive as he's running through bits of the level you've already completed a few minutes earlier. There's also a section in which you're wired up, taking instructions from Mona as you're clearing an apartment block. Hearing instructions like "the cleaners are to your left, through the hallway" as you've got your hand pressed against your ear makes you believe, if just for a split second, that you are actually playing through a film. Quentin Tarantino would most definitely approve. And, while I don't often eulogise female game characters, Mona is coolness personified. She's bad, as scarred as Max Payne, and packs out a mean pair of distressed jeans. I would quite like to marry her.

to suit your own capabilities, but it seems perfect – hard enough to make you cuss like a madman and rewarding enough to leave you with a smile on your face after you've cleared a room with one rotating dive.

JACKANORY

The Fall Of Max Payne is played across the backdrop of a deeper, more sophisticated tale, with loads of your favourite characters coming back for more. I'm not going into detail here – play it for yourself and revel in the twists and the occasional genuine shock when the game takes you into uncharted territories – but I can say the characters are well



Shot Dodge now leaves your precious Bullet Time intact.

fleshed out, to the point you actually start paying attention to every panel of the graphic novel that splits the action sequences. It's not the deal-clincher but it's a cut above most other games out there and it lifts what could be a brainless action shooter into something that little bit more.

DON'T BLINK

The only criticism I can muster is the length and even that's up for debate. Is the game too short? Is life too short? All I can say with any degree of certainty is that



The Mona levels are particularly impressive.

“Every element has been buffed beyond recognition and it's a thrill from start to finish”

LAUGHS? I HAD A FEW

STOP SNIGGERING AT THE BACK, THIS IS SERIOUS BUSINESS

Max Payne isn't here to make you laugh but there are some moments of genuine comedy, like the level in which you have to protect a doofus from blowing himself – and the rest of the neighbourhood – into little pieces. He's a massive fan of cartoon legend Captain Baseballbat-Boy (“I'm not a nerd, I'm a collector”) but he's got himself into a bit of a predicament. Stuck in costume, complete with one squeaky shoe, he's wired to go off if his costume head comes off. Padding around, swearing like an extra from a Scorsese gangster flick and panicking like a great daisy because he's too big to get through doors, you wouldn't believe a gunfight could be so much fun.



Headshots made easy.



Stay prone after diving for as long as you want.

Max Payne is not the type of man who gets ruffled.

like a ferocious boxing match, no game could keep up this sort of pace for much longer without losing the focus and direction, and any game that plays for up to 20 hours is usually padded to the rafters with filler, something



SECOND OPINION

WILL PORTER

Ten minutes into *Max Payne* and I was muttering darkly “flogged to death” and “seen it before”. A mere hour later, I felt like I had gone through a religious experience. The *ZONE* team had to ask me to stop playing as my whoops of delight were so frequent. This is a game that puts the hairs on the back of your neck in a state of permanent arousal.

I love the self-referential bits. The recurring characters, phrases and locations had me banging my keyboard on the ceiling in excitement. However I can't help but wonder whether a game this short deserves the high score our beloved commandant has given it, but I'm only quibbling over one or two per cent. It's awesome. You simply must play it.

of which *The Fall Of Max Payne* is utterly devoid. Personally, I'd rather pay my money for an experience that's going to leave me breathless and unable to sleep until it's over. I suppose there's sense in both sides of the argument, but I think that as long as you know the caveat, a short game can still be worthy of a classic rating. It's probably a bit of a cop-out to say that you can play through different modes once you're done with the game proper (although fresh downloads are already on the Internet, and mods will be available soon), but while you might be gagging for more at the end, surely that's a sign that you've just enjoyed your last few hours to the max. [M]

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Exhilarating action
- ✓ The best six hours you'll spend on your PC this year
- ✓ As cool as *Kill Bill*...
- ✗ But not much longer than *Kill Bill* Vols 1 and 2

93

Proof, if needed, that size isn't everything

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COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS – ZERO HOUR

**FULL VERSION OF
C&C: GENERALS
REQUIRED**

■ £19.99 | Pub: EA | Dev: EALA | ETA: Out Now | www.generals.ea.com

REQUIRES PIII 800MHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.8GHz and a GeForce 3 or above

Cometh the hour, cometh the C&C expansion pack... Richie Shoemaker reports



The number and variety of venomous units to deploy is superb.

THERE ARE more realistic and imaginative strategy games available, ones far more demanding of a tactical mind and others that offer up an historical challenge whether it be ancient or contemporary. But when it comes to whittling down the hours in the pursuit of pure fun, very few strategy games have been as easygoing or as enjoyable to play as the *Command & Conquer* series. For all its overt and senseless stereotyping, those that could stomach the all-too-current backdrop of its faux Desert

Storm setting found the same enjoyment in *C&C: Generals*, the most recent offspring in the near decade-old series.

Picking up from where last year's episode left off, *Zero Hour* dishes out three mini campaigns for each of the three warring sides. Unsurprisingly, EA has again sexed up current affairs with the USA ferrying humanitarian aid and hunting weapons of mass destruction (which in this game are easy to find), the Chinese fighting terrorist armies, while those opting to command the GLA must regroup and harass their two enemies with sneak attacks and biological weapons.

The levels themselves have moved away from the predominantly Middle Eastern desert locales of the first game and include North Africa, the Mediterranean islands and Western Europe, and while the main campaigns are brief they are no less spectacular than you would expect. Spruced up with in-engine cut-scenes, the game is a feast for the senses with



GLA troops can fire weapons from the back of combat bikes.

explosions that fill the screen, hordes of troops and tanks that pack the maps and the typical C&C soundtrack of industrial dirge that sets the mood perfectly.

CHALLENGE TANKS

To bolster what would otherwise be a thin expansion, EA has introduced a new single-player mode called Challenge; for all intents and purposes a homage to *Street Fighter* that has you, as your choice of general, taking on eight other generals one at a time as you attempt to become the mother of all battlefield commanders. Each general is an expert in a particular field, with



Helix chopper on the rampage.

bonuses and special units available depending on their skills. For example, play as Chinese General Kwai – an expert in armoured warfare – and you can build tanks cheaply and earn powerful bonus abilities, his weakness being that he can't recruit artillery units and aircraft are expensive. Go up against US General Alexander – a specialist in base defence, whose inability to build tanks is offset by EMP missiles and cheaper Particle Cannons – and you've got yourself an interesting battle.

HELIX MENACE

While the new strategies work well, the AI still makes some corking blunders; units often get caught up crossing bridges, while enemy generals always seem to rely on the same routes to attack you time and time

again. Saying that, your troops are more coordinated than they appeared last time around so there are improvements.

Of course this wouldn't be much of an expansion pack without some new units and EA has introduced plenty of upgrades and fresh reinforcements for each side. These include GLA combat bikes that tear across the maps at breakneck speed, Chinese Helix helicopters that can transport the massive Overlord tanks across the map and drop napalm bombs and, for the US, the Microwave tank that can reheat a chicken biryani in under five seconds – and reduce enemy buildings to rubble as a happy aside. Add in a couple of new General Abilities and new buildings, like the Chinese Internet Centre, and you have a hefty package that puts most add-ons to shame. **PCZ**

INPERSPECTIVE

WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS

Reviewed Issue 119, Score 85%

If you like your strategy games fast and furious, balanced with knife-edge precision and easy to play, then Blizzard's latest fantasy RTS should be in your collection along with a copy of *C&C: Generals*.

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR

Reviewed Issue 120, Score 90%

Arguably the best strategy game money can buy, *Medieval* is deep, incredibly strategic and features two games in one: a 2D *Risk* strategy map and stunning 3D RTS levels. Take over Europe, North Africa and the Middle East in the 400-year campaign. A classic.

"While the new strategies work well, the AI still makes some corking blunders"

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Challenge mode is a blast
- ✓ Fun new units, especially the combat bikes
- ✗ Brief and linear single-player campaign
- ✗ AI niggles

83

**Major improvement
(ho-ho)**



emotion, the peace
nurture, the knowledge
passion, the serenity
the power of the Force
releases the power of the Force
power to defend and protect
others
all life, in many forms
rather than seeking power
the god of the galaxy
improve themselves through
the training



FEAR LEADS TO ANGER. ANGER LEADS
TO HATRED. HATRED LEADS TO POWER. POWER
LEADS TO ANGER. FROM THROUGH YOU, YOU
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CALL OF DUTY

■ £39.99 | Pub: Activision | Dev: Infinity Ward | ETA: November 7 | www.callofduty.com

REQUIRES PIII 600 (PIII 700 for Windows 2000/XP), 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 1.2GHz, 256MB RAM and 64MB 3D card

Medal of Honor just got ambushed. Steve O'Hagan surveys the carnage

LIKE A highly-trained commando, we're going to go straight for the jugular on this one: *Call Of Duty* is the best single-player first-person shooter on release. It's the

mother of all battles, the big push, the winter offensive, the blitzkrieg. It might not be the quantum leap we're hoping *Half-Life 2* and *Doom 3* are going to be, but it's the apex of the genre as it stands right now: the absolute generalissimo of current-gen shooters.

If that isn't enough for you to make up your mind, then here's some more ammunition. *Call Of Duty* is the product of 22 members (including all key personnel) of the team that brought us the stunning *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*. And here are the results...

ALLIED FORCES

The first brownie point to be awarded to *CoD* is the fact that, unlike a slew of Yankee games and movies, it remembers a few more countries than just

the USA did a little bit of fighting in the war. Hence *CoD* is split up into three sections. The first follows a unit of American airborne forces in Normandy around D-Day, the second focuses on a British glider-borne unit during the same period, and the third shifts the action to Soviet Russia. Naff accents aside, it's about time we got to fight alongside the Red Devils at Pegasus Bridge.

The goal, surely, of a wartime shooter is to immerse the player in what feels like a raging battle – remember how everyone raved about the beach-landing level in *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*? But no other game as yet has recreated that absolute and total feeling of chaos and helplessness. *Call Of Duty* grabs this particular bull by the horns, and throws you into one full-

scale engagement after another in an anarchic, brutal, nerve-racking trial by combat.

THE STING OF BATTLE

It also manages to cram that heart-racing, mouth-drying nervousness of a tense online multiplayer battle into a single-player experience. Soldiers are running everywhere. Shells are exploding all around. Tracer rounds search out anything that moves. You are cowering behind a shattered half-tack, and you genuinely do not know what to do. When that Tiger tank slams through the wall to your flank, scattering infantry before it, it's the call of nature that you're thinking of answering – sod duty.

It's *CoD*'s crowning achievement at these moments – everything else in the room around you becomes immaterial,

with what's unfolding on the monitor in front of you monopolising every ounce of your attention.

Though it's always seemed painfully obvious to fans of tactical shooters and strategy games, the concepts of fire and manoeuvre have been painfully absent from the FPS genre since its inception. Not any more.

Built in to the AI of all the soldiers are human nuances. Essentially, every AI wants to survive. Fire a burst close to an exposed Nazi and he'll dive for cover or put his head down, providing the perfect opportunity for you to break cover and run to a new position. Working in conjunction with your squad mates, a bunch of you can be suppressing an enemy position this way, while others work their way round the flank to finish

INPERSPECTIVE

MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT

Reviewed Issue 112, Score 94%

It's sat atop our shooter A-list for many a month now, but its time has finally come. It's the nearest thing to *Call Of Duty* out there, but has been left in the shade by this powerful new release.

BATTLEFIELD 1942: DELUXE EDITION

Reviewed Issue 136, Score 85%

If it's multiplayer WWII action you're after, you can't get much better than *BF1942*. Now bundled with the *Road To Rome* expansion pack – check out our review on page 106.





Emplaced heavy machine guns can be a helpful asset.



The feeling of being on a real battlefield is unprecedented.



Using cover, such as trenches, is vital.



British glider-borne troops feature in chapter two.



The Russian levels are awesome.

them off with a couple of pineapples (see walkthrough).

As is the trend these days, you can only carry two weapons at a time (as well as a pistol and grenades). The various guns, though overtly similar, reveal idiosyncrasies in prolonged use. Take the sub-machine guns: The US Thompson lays down a tight burst of rounds, but kicks upwards pretty violently. The German MP40 is a little less accurate, though its kick is far

more manageable. The British Sten has good stability, even when you're moving, but is let down by a small magazine. But

boom-stick is a pleasure all players appreciate in battle.

Bricks look like bricks, foliage sways in the breeze, the water

of stuff to break up (there isn't much glass to be smashed or random furniture to get trashed in a fire fight), the views are so

particularly awesome displays of virtual set design.

And when things are really kicking off, the effect can be stupefying. As your Thompson spits out bullets, plaster and dust erupt around your target, obscuring the collapsing German in a grey cloud. Explosions send geysers of earth into the air. Distant explosions light up the night sky, and lines of tracer-fire claw their way into the heavens from the

"The way the engine recreates smoke and dust is flabbergasting – this FPS cuts a fine figure"

the finest of all is the Russian PPSH with its 71-round capacity and lack of kick. It may be the FPS equivalent of train spotting, but working out your favourite

effects are outstanding, and the way the engine recreates smoke and dust is flabbergasting – basically, CoD cuts a fine figure. Although there isn't a whole lot

detailed that it doesn't really matter. The jagged remains of factories and machine works in the industrial districts of Stalingrad and Warsaw are

PROPAGANDA FILMS

WAR FILM BUFFS WILL BE LIKE PIGS IN SHIT WITH CALL OF DUTY

It's no secret that *Call Of Duty* draws heavily from film and TV, going from gentle homage to outright rip-off. Do we think it's bad the game lifts the opening battle scene from *Enemy At The Gates*, lock stock and barrel? In a word, no. In fact, it's probably more exciting that you can relate what's unfolding to the reality portrayed so skilfully in film. There are plenty more film references in there, but here are some of the ones we spotted. Email us if you notice any more.



BAND OF BROTHERS

The assault on the German 88 battery in the opening levels is straight out of *Band Of Brothers*, episode three. (I really should get out more...)



THE DIRTY DOZEN

The mansion house you have to raid to rescue the British officers bears an uncanny resemblance to the headquarters they assault in *The Dirty Dozen*.



THE LONGEST DAY

The British glider assault on Pegasus Bridge is a memorable moment from star-studded black-and-white classic *The Longest Day*. Relive it here.



THE GREAT ESCAPE

In a nod to the movie with the great theme tune, one mission in *CoD* sees you raiding a familiar-looking German Stalag to release an American officer.

"When the action subsides, there are always little touches of class to look out for in CoD"



Get ready to duck.



Looking down the sights improves accuracy.

flak batteries you're tasked with finding and destroying.

And even when the action subsides, there are always little touches of class to look out for in CoD. For example, supply planes might drone overhead. A stray mortar round might land within eyeshot. Or radio chatter might blurt out of an idle receiver.

It doesn't try to maintain this furious military pandemonium constantly, though, and there are a fair share of behind-enemy-lines missions too. Rescuing captured officers from a POW camp, destroying anti-aircraft facilities around a hydro-electric dam, disabling an anchored German battleship – these are the missions that most closely resemble the wartime shooter blueprint. While these are every bit as fun as the equivalent missions in, say, *Medal Of Honor* or *Wolfenstein*, they don't really live up to the gripping intensity that CoD benchmarks in its more cinematic levels.

ALMOST PERFECT

Apart from these more humdrum levels, there is also the odd glitch in the AI. There are moments when enemy soldiers don't react to firing and screaming just round the corner. Your teammates sometimes end up dumbly looking at you with hangdog expressions waiting for your next move. And your sergeant major can take 20 heavy machine gun rounds in the chest, but still get up to continue the mission. But these blips occur far too infrequently to really have any serious impact



The game even tips its hat to *The Dambusters*, as you weaken some air defences before a raid.

WALKTHROUGH →

FIRE AND MANOEUVRE

"IF YOU DON'T OBSERVE BASIC MILITARY TACTICS, SOLDIER, THEN THE HUN WILL PUT YOUR NUTS THROUGH THE MANGLE QUICKER THAN A DOG'S FART." DO YOU SEE?



1 Respect the Bosche: when you hear the telltale roar of a Nazi Spandau HMG, the first thing on your mind ought to be biting the dust: that gun will tear you apart in seconds.



2 Suppress the Bosche: either you, or some of your comrades better lay down some suppressing fire in the direction of the machine gun to force him to take cover.



3 Flank the Bosche: while your buddies keep the gunner occupied, you sneak up to a good position round the flank. Keep crouched to avoid being seen.



4 Bingo: over go a couple of grenades, and Bob's your uncle – and cousin Jerry runs for his life. Preferably into the welcoming guns of your fine comrades.



SECOND OPINION

MARTIN KORDA

Magnificent. Breathtaking. Stunning. Immersive. Unrivalled. All of these superlatives and a myriad more can be applied to *Call Of Duty*. Put simply, this is the greatest first-person shooter around. All of the tension and visceral fear of *Medal Of Honor's* Omaha Beach Landing mission are present here from start to finish, with the mayhem occasionally broken up by some intelligent solo missions and tank-based rampages. The result is a game of near-perfect pacing and atmosphere throughout.

The sickening fear you feel as you're pinned down by enemy fire, crawling through the mud to find shelter from the hail of death crashing down around you is staggering. Coupled with some dread-inducing sound effects and a subtle yet superbly effective soundtrack, this is the ultimate WWII shooter. A shooter that not only entertains, but pays homage to the tens of thousands who lost their lives in the conflict with true respect.

It's not perfect, with the odd AI glitch and indestructible team-mate marring things ever so slightly. But for me, this is easily the finest, most enthralling game of 2003.

on your complete immersion.

It's rare you finish an FPS and immediately start again on the next difficulty level. But so much of CoD flies by in a barely remembered blur of chaotic action, that's exactly what we did when we finished. *Medal of Honor* better have a pretty heavy-duty counter attack up its sleeve, or for it, the war will most definitely be over. **PC2**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Scintillating atmosphere of battle
- ✓ Tactical combat dynamics
- ✓ Majestic set design
- ✓ Play as Brits and Russians
- ✗ Occasional lacklustre mission
- ✗ It comes to an end!

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An unrivalled assault on the senses. Absolutely, utterly brilliant



1972

**Mikey and Jimmy know a
hot deal when they see one.**

2003

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AGE OF MYTHOLOGY: THE TITANS



FULL VERSION OF
ORIGINAL GAME
REQUIRED

■ £24.99 | Pub: Microsoft | Dev: Ensemble Studios | ETA: Out Now | www.microsoft.com/games/titans

REQUIRES PII 450, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card DESIRES PIII 800, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

Rhianna Pratchett slips into something nice and Titan to play with the gods in AoM's first expansion pack



One god power allows you to deconstruct big buildings like wonders.



The bigger they are... the harder they hit you.



New units include self-repairing robots and carnivorous plants.

THE AGE OF... series has always been a reassuringly dependable RTS, the strategy equivalent of a cup of cocoa and a pair of fluffy slippers. However, Ensemble wasn't content to rest on its well-established laurels with *Age Of Mythology*, and instead dug deep into its RTS pockets to bring us a beautiful, finely tuned game with a host of weird and wonderful creatures pulled straight from the pages of a book on mythology.

The *Titans* expansion pack focuses mainly on a new civilisation, the Atlanteans, led by Kastor, the son of Arkantos, the hero from the original game. In the meaty single-player campaign, the tale of the Atlanteans is spread over 12 missions, all of which are neatly designed and more than a match for anything in the original game.

NEW TOYS ON THE BLOCK

Part of this is due to the wide range of new features and tile-sets Microsoft has added to the in-game editor – the flourishing AoM modding community will have nothing to complain about when they see all the new toys they've got to play with. In fact, the developers do seem to have paid quite a bit of attention to the multiplayer side of *Titans*. As well as polishing up the online interface, they've also included a number of AI

'personalities', with unique playing styles that mimic the methods of real-life opponents.

GREEK CHIC

The Atlanteans themselves are like a more interesting version of the Greeks, who personally I've always found to be quite dull compared to the showy and frantic Egyptians and the Norse. They come complete with their own set of major Titan gods; Kronos, Oranos and Gaia, plus nine minor gods.

The various Titan god powers and the Atlantean features add some very interesting strategic twists to the game. For instance, all their buildings come replete with a time shift

power, which allows them to be moved to different parts of the map. The vortex god power literally sucks all your military units up and drops them in one place. The Atlanteans also curry favour with their chosen gods by taking over town centres rather than praying at temples, building relics or fighting, making them much more of a territory-conscious side to play.

Unfortunately there are very few changes to the existing sides, but the key addition is a giant creature for each side – monstrous beings that can cause enormous amounts of damage. When you've managed to create one of these Titans they will roam about the map

tearing things up and fighting each other like a Japanese monster movie.

Overall this is a great value expansion pack. The single-player campaign is very satisfying, the new race has some very interesting potential for online games and the new *Titans* are superb fun, if not particularly subtle. With typical Ensemble aplomb, *Age Of Mythology* has just received a titanic new lease of life. **A+**

INPERSPECTIVE

WARRIOR KINGS: BATTLES

Reviewed Issue 128, Score 85%
Warrior Kings: Battles is a spectacular-looking RTS, boasting a superb free-roaming camera. Hugely strategic (more so than *Age Of Mythology*), it's an essential for any self-respecting RTS lover.

RISE OF NATIONS

Reviewed Issue 129, Score 90%
Another Microsoft RTS, but very different from AoM, with much more focus on city building and trade routes.



"Titans roam about the map tearing things up and fighting each other like a Japanese monster movie"

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Well-designed campaign
- ✓ Great new civilisation
- ✓ Lots of multiplayer tweaks
- ✗ Needs a free-roaming camera
- ✗ Few changes to existing sides

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An add-on pack of titanic proportions

"...a great looking sci-fi blaster..." GamesMaster



PC
CD
ROM



"Beautiful" Edge

"A game so cool even the Fonz wants to play it." IGN.com

WAGER

STARRING MAGNUS TIDE SARAH McDAVID GUNTHER VAN BERG
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SPACE COLONY

■ £34.99 | Pub: Gathering | Dev: Firefly Studios | ETA: Out Now |
www.spacecolonygame.com

REQUIRES PIII 800, 64 MB RAM and a 4MB 3D card DESIRES PIII 1.2GHz, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card

Rhianna Pratchett gets lost in space in Firefly's latest god game



Your boss is Timmy Mallet's granddad.



Aliens in jars, the kids will love 'em.



Tourism is a valuable source of income.

IN THE average strategy game you may have to worry about feeding your troops and kitting them out, but it's rare that you actually have to care about their mental well-being and whether they prefer saunas over Jacuzzis. Thus it was with great intrigue that I sat down to try my hand at *Space Colony*, which is all about managing personalities and situations as you take charge of a team of 20 misfit

colonists as they bumble their way around the galaxy.

CARING, SHARING

Although it doesn't look like Firefly Studio's previous games *Stronghold* and *Stronghold: Crusader*, *Space Colony* has similar gameplay mechanics. The main single-player campaign follows the exploits of your heroine, Venus Jones, and her deliberately mis-matched crewmates. It also branches off into economic

missions (in which you focus on building up your base and attracting tourists) and military missions (in which

you battle with the neighboring life forms). Additionally, there's a galaxy mode (with standalone campaigns), a sandbox feature and an editor, so you won't be short of things to do.

The pay-off for the rather inflexible 2D isometric look of *Space Colony*, which doesn't allow for zooming or rotation, is buckets of detail. Like *Stronghold*, when you've got everything up and running, it's a pleasure to sit back and watch your base whirling with life.

As for the colonists themselves, while most of them are overblown caricatures like the stuck-up French Babette or the plummy Charles, they're mostly a fun bunch. This is aided in no small part by their varied personal dialogue lines – they're constantly surprising and amusing you as they

trundle around, sulking, flirting, fighting and generally getting on each other's nerves.

EGO AND ID

The idea is to basically keep these little dears content, which is measured by their personal satisfaction charts – the more you massage their needs, the more they massage your bank balance. But each colonist has particular skills, likes and dislikes, which you have to control by what you choose to build. For example, Ashia Green is a fitness freak and responds well to lots of gym equipment around the place, while Greg, a sleazy narcissist, just wants to lounge around in the hot tub all day.

There are lots of sci-fi influences woven into the gameplay from the likes of *Aliens*

and *Star Trek*. Seeing a tubby middle-aged Indian lady in a green sari frantically brandishing a laser at a group of furbal aliens is a golden moment.

It's a shame that it doesn't have a 3D engine to allow for a few more interesting camera angles and perspectives. But Firefly's *Theme Hospital* meets *Red Dwarf* approach, which could have so easily turned into a second-rate *Sims*, has instead produced a game with a great deal of charm and humour. **PC2**

INPERSPECTIVE

STRONGHOLD: CRUSADER

Reviewed Issue 122, Score 82%
For those of you who like more traditional strategy settings, *Stronghold's* mixture of castle building and siege warfare depicted in beautiful medieval detail will hit the RTS spot.

SIM CITY 4

Reviewed Issue 125, Score 80%
No worrying about whether your little inhabitants get on with each other, instead you just have to concern yourself with things like traffic control, pollution and the odd riot. Sweet.



“When you’ve got everything up and running, it’s a pleasure to sit back and watch your base whirling with life”

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Challenging
- ✓ Good AI
- ✓ Plenty of missions
- ✓ Beautifully detailed
- ✗ Limited viewpoints
- ✗ Rather overblown characters

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Space tripping

THE SIMPSONS: HIT & RUN

■ £29.99 | Pub: VU Games | Dev: Radical Entertainment |

ETA: Out Now | www.thesimpsons-hitandrun.com

REQUIRES Pill 700, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

DESIRES P4 1.5GHz, 256MB and a 64MB 3D card

Is Springfield the new Vice City? Jamie Sefton cracks open a Duff and plays *Grand Theft Apu*



The Simpsons: Hit & Run mixes GTA-style driving with platforming – and succeeds. Here Mr Smithers eats Homer's tail pipe.

THE SIMPSONS is the funniest thing on TV. Fact. Matt Groening's legendary cartoon series is rich with immense characterisations, from Krusty the Clown and his love of porn to the incomparable

comedy genius of Homer Simpson and his mortal fear of sock puppets. But, however amazing the series is on your goggle-box, the recent wholesale ripping-off of game ideas for *The Simpsons: Road Rage* (Crazy Taxi) and *The Simpsons: Skateboarding* (Tony Hawk's Pro Skater) on console has left a taste in the mouth as bitter as one of Apu's famous chutney squishees.

CEL-SHADY

So, how is *The Simpsons: Hit & Run*? Well, to say it borrows from *Grand Theft Auto* would be an

understatement on a par with mentioning that Barney Gumble likes the odd tippie, but *Hit & Run* is actually a bundle of fun and could actually be *The Simpsons'* best videogame

the Bowl-a-Rama, Mr Burns' nuclear power plant and the Simpsons' family home. You can even enter some of the buildings, so a visit to Moe's Tavern will allow you to have a

"A visit to Moe's Tavern will allow you to have a play on the Love Tester machine"

outing yet. For starters you have a gorgeous, cel-shaded 3D Springfield to explore on foot or by vehicle, complete with famous landmarks such as

play on the Love Tester machine, catch Bumblebee Man on his break and see the poster adverts for "The 7 Duffs" that include Sleazy, Queasy and Remorseful.

SOUNDS FAMILIAR

Then there's the fantastic voice-acting from Dan Castellaneta and all the regular cast from *The Simpsons*, with some genuinely laugh-out-loud dialogue created by the series' writers, including Homer's aside about "stupid Flanders getting happiness from religion" and Principal Skinner's warning to Bart that he'll get him "just like I got Charlie in 'Nam".

Certain phrases start to grind after a while (Bart's "don't have a cow, man" springs to mind), but there's enough variety to keep you playing in search of more sick jokes and brutal one-liners.

INPERSPECTIVE

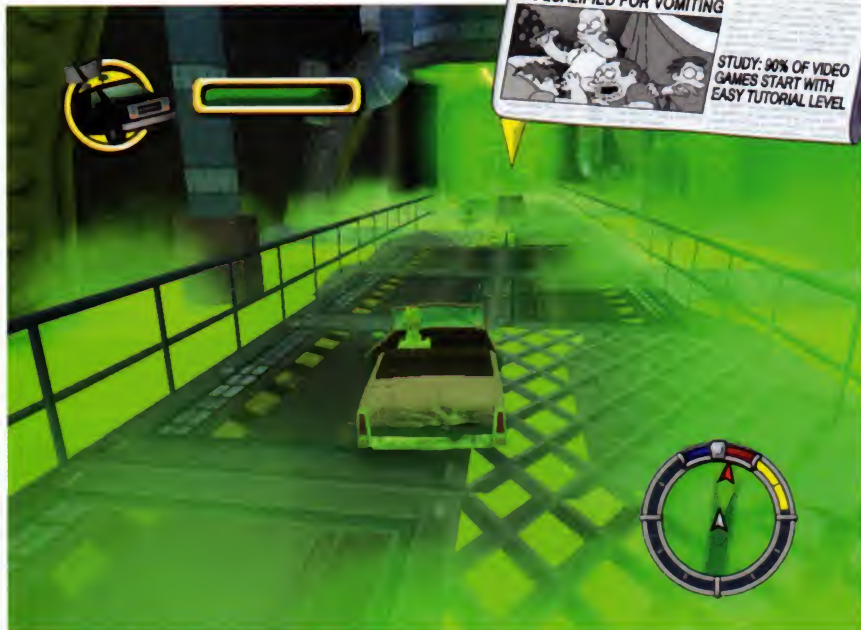
GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY
Reviewed Issue 131, Score 95%

One of the best and most freeform games ever made.

TOONCAR

Reviewed Issue 109, Score 72%

Fun Mario Kart-like racing. Basic, but you'll be grinning ear to ear.



Homer takes a detour through Mr Burns' nuclear plant. "It's pronounced 'nukular'."



Bart tops up on rocket fuel at Moe's.



Collecting coins spurs Homer's feminine side.

WORST. EPISODE. EVER.

D'OH! THE SIMPSONS: HIT & RUN IS PACKED WITH VISUAL GAGS, CHARACTERS AND VEHICLES FROM THE ACTUAL SERIES

If you know off the top of your head that Homer's favourite record is *It's Raining Men* by the Weathergirls, or that it was Maggie Simpson who shot Mr Burns, then you're going to get a kick out of *The Simpsons: Hit & Run*. The game is littered with so many in-jokes and comic references from 14 seasons of the series, it'll have you constantly slowing down your vehicle to read posters, shop signs and advertising hoardings with slogans such as "Don't Eat Beef. Eat Deer" and "Vote Mayor Quimby. He'd vote for you". You also have the opportunity to get your hands on Collector Cards that have quotes and info from *The Simpsons* episodes, and as you collect coins through the game you can spend your cash on extra costumes for the main characters, such as a "trendy" costume for Lisa and a large person's Hawaiian Muumuu dress for Homer. It's a *Simpsons* fanboy's dream – just don't end up like Comic Book Guy: "Ohhhh. Loneliness and cheeseburgers are a dangerous mix..."



Nerd overload: Lisa encounters Comic Book Guy.



Hit & Run's gags have been created by the series' writers.

Hit & Run's gameplay is generally based around simple story-driven missions for the main characters of Bart, Lisa, Homer, Marge and Apu, involving timed tasks, ranging from collecting copies of the violent videogame *Bonestorm II* by crashing the Simpson family car into the delivery van, to rounding up escaped simians from Dr Nick's Screaming Monkey Medical Research Centre.

Navigating around Springfield is simple enough with the map in the bottom right-hand corner of the screen, but just to make sure, developer Radical has placed giant green arrows on the road pointing you in the right direction.

In addition to the main sections, there are a heap of bonus missions you can complete, which include street racing, destroying flying wasp-cams (part of the ridiculous plot), pulling off successful visual gags and finding special Collector Cards (see 'Worst.

Episode. Ever' box). However, you also have the *Hit & Run* random element from the game's title, which involves a hectic car chase around Springfield if you commit a crime within donut-eating distance of Police Chief Wiggum – get caught, and you're busted and slapped with a heavy fine.

Each of the playable characters has access to over 40 vehicles from the show, including Homer's Mr Plow snow vehicle and Cletus the slack-jawed yokel's pick-up truck. But you can also stop and get in any car you like, such as Comic Book Guy's "Fat-mobile", although in a distinctly crime-free twist, you sit in the passenger seat next to the character.

AY CARUMBA!

Some PC gamers will hate the idea of *The Simpsons: Hit & Run* – basically, that it unashamedly uses the *GTA* model and jemmies *The Simpsons* licence into it. Yet, despite that, *Hit & Run* actually turns out to have a great deal of charm – even

though it'll probably only entertain you for a day or two at most. The car handling is somewhat sluggish compared with other driving titles and the camera often wanders off into uncharted territory when you go on foot – especially in the uninspiring platform sections.

While *The Simpsons: Hit & Run* may not win any gaming innovation awards, for fans of the series the opportunity to take a virtual tour around a fully-realised Springfield will be harder to resist than a gigantic fresh donut with chocolate sprinkles and icing. Mmmm... plagiaricious. **B+**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Fabulous cel-shaded cartoon graphics recreate Springfield in 3D detail
- ✓ Genuinely funny gags and original voice-acting
- ✓ Good fun to play for a short while
- ✗ Derivative *GTA*-lite gameplay
- ✗ Some camera issues
- ✗ No multiplayer

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Whoo-hoo! A decent *Simpsons* game at last



Giant, mysterious machines with inviting levers await your touch.



Tom Cruise eat your heart out.



Boxes. You'll see a lot of these little beauties.

BROKEN SWORD: THE SLEEPING DRAGON

■ £29.99 | Pub: THQ | Dev: Revolution | ETA: Out Now | www.broken-sword.com

REQUIRES PIII 750, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 1.2 GHz, 128MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

For years, **Will Porter** has carried around an inventory comprising a bottle opener, a bird's nest and a mouldy burger – just to see if they come in useful. Today they will...

THERE WAS a time when all this was fields. A better time. A time when you could leave your door unlocked without the fear of waking up next to a crack dealer who thought your bed looked comfortable. In this pure and innocent decade (the '90s), simple folk could console themselves with the simple pleasures of the 2D point-and-click interface. Then those wicked graphics cards arrived, and all hell came with them –

guns, bombs, swords, stealth, action and all kinds of 3D tomfoolery, whose confines wouldn't even allow for puzzles in which you had to hit a goat on the nose with a stick. The point and click had met its tragic end.

NEW BEGINNING

The fight-back, however, has begun and a resurgence of the old ways is in the offing, most of it depending on the commercial impact of both *The Sleeping Dragon*, the third instalment of the *Broken Sword* series, and the forthcoming *Sam & Max* game. For point-and-click fanboys such as myself, a hell of a lot is riding on *Broken Sword 3*, and the good news is that the leap to 3D has been a fruitful one, even if the game itself won't set the world on fire.

The game continues the adventures of George Stobbart, a blond-haired American who, in previous games, has had some run-ins with various secret



Flat-caps are the must-have accessory for all aspiring murderers this season.

societies. Here, his predilection for angering 'men with robes' is continued when he stumbles upon a murdered scientist, a giant ancient power source and

a conspiracy that threatens the safety of the world itself. Meanwhile, Nico (George's sexy French friend) is having a few problems of her own, having

become the second game heroine this year, after Lara, to be wrongfully arrested for murder in Paris. At cliff-hanger moments the action skips

INPERSPECTIVE

TOMB RAIDER: THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS

Reviewed Issue 132, Score 68%
Lara's exploits have gone poo of late, and *Broken Sword's* simplified leaping and jumping makes a nice change.

GRIM FANDANGO

Reviewed Issue 71, Score 90%
For sheer puzzling class and quasi-3D environments you can't beat the LucasArts greats.

ACTION MAN

FASTEST FINGER FIRST

Something that adds a cinematic edge to proceedings in *Broken Sword 3* are the 'action points' that are scattered through the game. At particularly dangerous points, you're given a split second to react before you are killed (although this really only means you have to sit through the cut-scene again). The way in which these are implemented is superb and really wakes you up from some of the more gloopy dialogue.



If you don't get to the car quick enough you'll wind up dead.

"The game isn't perfect, but it pulls the 2D world into the 3D graphics realm with aplomb"

there are some absolute gems, but all too often it boils down to finding ways to open doors (oil hinges, use iron bar, push block on to pressure pad, ask Nico nicely, etc).

The dividing line that hovers over the *Broken Sword* series has always been its dialogue and story: fans can't get enough of it and demand more, others slowly reach for a hammer. Because the story is so dense (with a myriad of strange terms, myths and stereotypical characters who waffle on about everything and anything), there can be so much talking that you find yourself switching off and picking the dirt out of your fingernails. As a game the dialogue does the job, but within single conversations it lacks the sparkle that marks so many great adventure games. All too often you find yourself mindlessly clicking through all the dialogue options so you can progress, and if I EVER hear a chirpy American voice telling me he can't open a locked door again, I swear I'll do something unsavoury to the tourists around Buckingham Palace.

SLIGHT RETURN

I hate being nasty to a genre I feel so attached to, it's like kicking my own mother in the teeth, so I'll end on a positive note. The game's problems are the exact same ones that so many people overlooked so many years ago; fans will find

it a worthy continuation to the *Broken Sword* oeuvre, and a very pretty one at that. However, if you couldn't recognise a point-and-click adventure if it pointed at you and clicked, then perhaps your thirst for problem-solving and conspiracies could be more effectively quenched by the *Deus Ex* of this world.

But if you're a fan of the genre, praying for a renaissance of the most worthy of PC games, then you can rejoice. *The Sleeping Dragon* is far from perfect, but it pulls the 2D world into the realm of the 3D graphics card with aplomb, even if it still carries the same baggage as its previous incarnations. With a little luck, publishers and developers will prick up their ears and take note... (The three-headed monkey will rise again.) **PCZ**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Good transition to 3D world
- ✓ Excellent cinematic moments and 'action points'
- ✓ Some clever puzzles
- ✗ Bloody boxes!
- ✗ Stereotypical and meandering dialogue

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Not broken, not fixed, but welcome anyway



Herman and Heinrich: the best stair-minders

money can buy.



This guy's Australian. Australians like beer. Use beer with Australian. Top banana!

between the characters until their stories entwine and the pair investigate together: opening doors, pushing blocks and talking to eccentric locals in places as varied as the Amazon, the Czech Republic, run-down Parisian theatres and the chocolate-box environs of Glastonbury in quaint Olde England.

The best bit about *The Sleeping Dragon* is the control system, which manages to establish George's adventures in the third dimension while still having the same 'feel' as its 2D roots. The game has clearly been designed with a console audience in mind the keys are eerily reminiscent of the latest *Zelda* release on the GameCube – but this doesn't harm it whatsoever. Characters are moved with the cursor keys, while the WASD buttons have varying options depending on the object you want to

manipulate. From the screenshots you might well assume that in some sections *Broken Sword* has gone a little bit Lara, what with all the climbing and the leaping, but this is all handled through simple button clicking rather than the perfect timing and clenched fists required in Ms Croft's efforts. And handled to good effect, I might add. Your inventory, meanwhile, can be opened at any time and your obtuse collection of underwear, bottle openers and wigs can be used and abused on your environment and

those around you (invariably alongside the traditional withering comments of "that didn't work").

BOX CRAZY

With 3D, however, come boxes, lots of boxes. Perhaps game programmers want to promote the

pushing and pulling of boxes so much that you begin to suspect they own a lot of shares in the box manufacturing industry. One or two puzzles that require crate shifting is fine, but the game is interrupted by so many box-moving sections that you'll never be able to go to IKEA again. There are, of course, a wide range of more cogent puzzles available, and



THE LORD OF THE RINGS: WAR OF THE RING

■ £34.99 | Pub: VU Games | Dev: Liquid Entertainment | ETA: November 21 | www.warofthering.com

REQUIRES PIII 800MHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Keith Pullin prepares the defences as the Dark Lord's hand creeps towards Frodo's ring



These fat boys have broken the bridge.

THIS December, millions of people will descend like crazed orcs upon cinemas across the globe to watch the third and final instalment of *The Lord Of The Rings*. To the utter glee of game publishers, a good percentage of these hungry consumers will also purchase a game based around Tolkien's masterpiece.

Vivendi Universal's *The Lord Of The Rings: War Of The Ring* is one of the games on offer and despite having absolutely naff all to do with the latest film, it's in the right place at the right time.

INPERSPECTIVE

BATTLE REALMS

Reviewed Issue 111, Score 86%
Battle Realms (now bundled with its expansion pack) is a better RTS game simply because you can utilise the unit alchemy feature, which is missing from *WotR*.

WARCRAFT III

Reviewed Issue 119, Score 85%
If strategy, orcs and magic are your bag, then look no further than *Warcraft III* and its fine expansion pack, *The Frozen Throne*.

War Of The Ring is a fast-paced arcade-style RTS covering 21 of the greatest battles of Middle-Earth's Third Age. Credibility-wise it would be easy to dismiss it simply because it's not a glamorous EA film licence, but the truth is Liquid Entertainment's mastery of its art has conjured up what is one of the most imaginative uses of the *LotR* book licence to date.

LORD OF THE REALMS?

Liquid's interpretation of Middle-Earth is not so much a good game though, as a good expansion pack for *Battle*

"A fast-paced arcade-style RTS covering 21 of the greatest battles of Middle-Earth's Third Age"

Realms. *WotR* boasts beautifully vibrant landscapes, excellent use of elevation and a very easy-to-use interface. In fact the only real difference between *BR* and *WotR* is that instead of sumo wrestlers with cannons embedded in their stomachs

and exploding undead, we have trolls, orcs, elves, dwarves and those hideous humans.

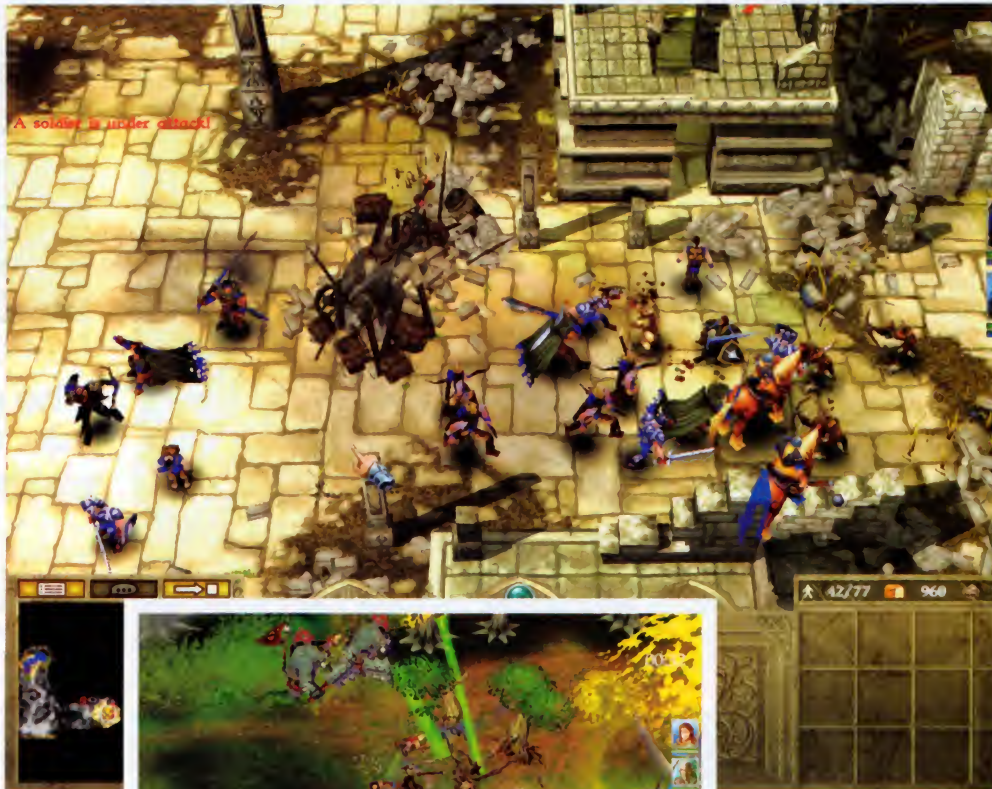
Also present are the nine fellowship members. These one-of-a-kind 'hero' units (did you honestly think you'd be able to create an entire army of Frodos

and rush Mordor?) possess unique abilities ranging from Sting (Frodo's sword) being more effective against orcs, through to Gandalf spearing the dark hordes with his trusty lightning bolts. Hero units also gain experience during a battle

so the longer they stay alive the deadlier they become.

Alternatively, you can forget this entire goody-two-shoes lark and embark on the evil campaign where you can put the withering special abilities of Mr Nazgul and co to work instead.

Generally speaking, *WotR* sticks to the book's description of the battles, which means it's rare for more than two or three heroes to be together on any one level. Just as well really, because *WotR* is easy enough as it is without having nine



Utter carnage.



Many of the films' characters are present.

superheroes winning every battle. And while we're having a bit of a whinge, it's worth noting that up close the units are exceedingly unpleasant on the eye and it's not just the orcs.

Overall, though, *WotR* is a pretty accomplished game. OK, it's not the greatest RTS ever made, but if you're a Tolkien fan who's fed up with third-person hack'n'slash action games, this pleasingly original take on the book could well be the pipeweed for you. **PCZ**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ All the main characters are present
- ✓ Very easy to get into
- ✓ First-ever *LotR* RTS
- ✗ More like a mod for *BR*
- ✗ Below average graphics

73

Simplistic entertainment

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"Sorry guv, I ain't going sarf of the Crack of Doom at this time of night."

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: RETURN OF THE KING

■ £34.99 | Pub: EA | Dev: EA Redwood Shores | ETA: Nov 14 | www.lordoftherings-eagames.co.uk

REQUIRES PIII 700, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card DESIRES P4 1.4GHz, 256MB RAM, 64MB 3D card and a decent gamepad

Steve O'Hagan travels to Middle-Earth to fight the good fight in this pretty but shallow action adventure

INPERSPECTIVE

ENTER THE MATRIX

Reviewed Issue 130, Score 72%

Another major motion picture licence, which wows you with footage of the film, the real actors' voices and, in this case, extra storytelling from the world of *The Matrix*. But guess what? The gameplay's a little one-dimensional and lacks longevity. Is there a pattern emerging?

DIABLO II

Reviewed Issue 93, Score 72%

If it's non-stop orc-slaying you're after, but executed in such a way that you won't want to come up for air for weeks, *Diablo's* where it's at. Loosely described as an RPG, *Diablo* offers one of the most addictive blends of frantic fantasy fisticuffs, object collection and levelling up you can find.

HOW MANY of us who've read *The Lord Of The Rings* can claim to not have skipped those increasingly mind-numbing transcriptions of Elvish songs? Come on, maybe you ploughed through the first couple, but be honest, it is the literary equivalent of watching paint dry. So maybe it's to redress the balance that EA has undertaken to release such a relentlessly action-packed tie-in to round off the movie trilogy.

Return Of The King, as you'd expect, picks up the story with the victory at Helm's Deep. From there it follows three paths – one staying with Gandalf, one tracking Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli, and the third trailing Sam and Frodo as they venture deep into Mordor.

What we have, in the parlance of console gaming (*ROTK* is released simultaneously on PC, PS2, Xbox and GBA), is known as a free-roaming beat 'em up. Typically, what happens is you wander through a level smacking

"Watching the cut-scenes, you know this Hollywood coating is not why you buy games"

the living crap out of a stream of orcs, goblins and spectres. The emphasis is on excitement – flashy effects, masses of action, and with as little thought necessary as possible.

The one thing that stands out about *ROTK* is its striking looks.

The 12 environments, from the ramparts of Helm's Deep to the Fangorn Forest to the evil wastelands of Mordor itself, are nothing short of magnificent.

Which is to say nothing of the legions of snarling orcs, armoured

Uruk-hai and scuttling goblins and spectres whom you get to so sumptuously do away with. Decked out exactly as in the movies, with the same guttural voices, vicious-looking weapons and even animations, these make first-class cannon fodder.

There's no escaping that *ROTK* is designed with consoles in mind. Consequently, playing the game with a mouse and keyboard is like stirring soup with a severed sheep's head – it just shouldn't be done. So you'd better find yourself a gamepad if you're thinking of joining the fight against Sauron. While you're at it, make it a well-built and comfortable one, because for many hours you will be sat, face contorted, hammering buttons for all you're worth.

PAD MASHER

ROTK is a button basher. It's practically that arcade classic *Gauntlet* in Middle-Earth; a *Diablo* in 3D. Yes, there are a variety of attacks, special moves



"Didn't I see you in *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*?"



Gandalf sorts out a spot of bother with the neighbours.



The Lynx Effect didn't quite work the way Sam expected.

and combos to be learned, but simply smashing the basic attack buttons more or less randomly is enough to see you through most of the game.

Some steps have been taken to add extra dimensions to the non-stop gamepad abuse. All characters have a ranged attack, but an auto-aiming system removes any finesse that may have arisen from this.

There's an RPG-style levelling-up system, with experience points spent to gain extra abilities and combo moves, but it's not sophisticated enough to provide any real longevity.

To its credit, *ROTK* tries to break things up with extra goals and tasks within the levels. At one point you have to slaughter reams of fleeing Uruk-hai with the assistance of some stomping Ents before the way ahead opens.

Another level sees you helping defend the walls of Minas Tirith, where, apart from cracking skulls, you have to beat back orcs scaling ladders

and siege towers to prevent an 'overrun' gauge filling up.

HOLLYWOOD TRIMMINGS

EA is obviously determined to get its money's worth out of this franchise. So we have footage from the films, the real actors' voices and likenesses, and even bits of concept art and interviews with the likes of Christopher Lee as rewards for finishing levels. Very glossy, very slick. However, as you watch cut-scenes from the film and listen to Ian McKellen narrate the next section, you know this Hollywood coating is not why you buy games.

However, as much as every anti-marketing, brand-hating bone in my body tells me that *Return Of The King* sucks ass, a few levels in, and despite suffering repetitive-strain syndrome from abusing my gamepad, I discover I am enjoying myself. It's nice to hear Mr

McKellen's sage-like voice. It's nice to watch some of the best bits from the movies again. And slaughtering hordes of bellowing orcs can be fun.

But that doesn't mean we'd recommend this as a worthy buy – it's far too one-dimensional. If you've got a *Rings*-mad younger brother, or you're an insatiable consumer of all things *Rings*, then yes, this has got all the Tolkien trimmings you could ask for. Ultimately though, it's a shallow affair, something that no amount of EA gloss can hide. **PC**

THE FELLOWSHIP OF MAN

BE YOUR FAVOURITE MIDDLE-EARTH RACIAL MINORITY HERO

All the main characters are playable in *ROTK*, as well as a bunch of secret heroes to unlock. Each has the same range of basic moves, livened up with some individual special moves such as Gandalf's orc-killing aura, and Sam's elven-cloak-powered invisibility. It seems in this interpretation of Middle-Earth, Sam Gamgee is equally as effective in hand-to-hand combat as Gimli or Aragorn. Something to enrage purists.

In most missions there are more than one of you – Sam, Frodo and Gollum stick together, as do Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli – and your companions do try to help out a little in battle. There is also an enjoyable co-op mode, in which two players can inhabit the same screen using two controllers (or one on the keyboard and mouse) – which, as mentioned in our review, reminds you of such classic arcade games of yore as *Gauntlet*.



All your favourite characters are present.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Captures the look of the films perfectly
- ✓ Uses the real actors' voices
- ✓ Non-stop action
- ✗ One button kills all
- ✗ Pavement-puddle shallow
- ✗ Better suited to consoles

68

Mindless and repetitive, but still fun





Nice motah. I'll have that.



All you illegal immigrants, stop hiding and come out. I've got your forged passports ready.

FREEDOM FIGHTERS

■ £29.99 | Pub: EA | Dev: Io Interactive | ETA: September 26 |

www.eagames.com/official/freedom

REQUIRES PIII 750, 64MB RAM and a 32MB T&L 3D card

DESIRES PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

The Reds have taken over and the fate of the United States is in *Will Porter's* hands. That's the Yanks finished then...

COMMUNISTS eh?

Just when you thought all that stuff over in Russia had been drowned in a torrent of vodka, organised crime and Tom Clancy bollocks, it turns out that in an alternate time-line they've only gone and taken over the United States. Typical! Thankfully a New York plumber is on hand to lead the fight against the pinko-Ruskie terror, make lots of things explode and wave the star-spangled banner right in Ivan's dirty face.

Freedom Fighters is a third-person squad-based shooter that revels in its own simplicity. You recruit people by sidling up to them and pressing the 'E' button and consequently give them orders that never stray beyond "follow me", "stay here" and "go over there and shoot stuff". At first, when you're a rookie warrior and don't have the



Helloooo ladies. I knew I joined the resistance for a reason.

notoriety to recruit more than one or two brothers-in-arms, it's easy to sneer at the basic way in which the game works. But when you're leading eight men into battle, with the basic command system allowing you to put some rudimentary battle tactics into the mix, the sheer joy of simple arcade action takes over. Barrels explode, bodies fly 20 feet into the air, machine-gun turrets are taken over

and countless Russians are set alight by your array of incendiary devices – and all to stirring Russian music with choirs chanting in ominous bass tones.

DAMN RUSKIES

The maps you fight through are reminiscent of the early missions of *Deus Ex*: urban pockets of New York with various targets on each marked for liberation. You generally have three levels open to you at any time, and knocking out, say, a power station or a helicopter pad on one will make your assault on the next slightly easier due to the distinct lack of helicopters



Later levels really start hotting up as the body-count soars.

and/or electricity. It tries to hoodwink you into thinking it's slightly non-linear, but episodes will always end with the US flag being raised over some civic building while you roll your eyes, mutter darkly about American foreign policy and hypocritically wait until the game lets you kill some more Russians.

BACK IN THE USSR

Al-wise, your enemies are nothing more than cannon fodder. They'll occasionally duck behind buildings or leg it to the nearest vacant machinegun placement, but they'll spend most of their time standing around or being blown about the screen by some pretty impressive rag-doll physics. The game also suffers in the weaponry department, which is pretty humdrum, while the Russians themselves take a lot of killing. I undertook a 'scientific survey' which revealed that the average Soviet Trooper can take three sniper shots to

the groin before collapsing. Balls of steel? Maybe, but those used to the one-shot-one-kill mentality may have a hard time adjusting.

In the annals of gaming history, *Freedom Fighters* won't even make it to a foot-note, but as a 'disengage-brain' late-night distraction it more than fulfils its duties as a supplier of popcorn-entertainment. Fidel Castro won't like it, but you probably will. **[B+]**

INPERSPECTIVE

PROJECT EDEN

Reviewed Issue 107, Score 85%
From the creators of *Lara*, *Project Eden* puts you in charge of a team of four highly varied law enforcers, charged with cleaning up a shitty future city. Providing much more teamwork than *Freedom Fighters*, it's now available at a budget price.

MAX PAYNE

Reviewed Issue 107, Score 90%
If you fancy shooting up New York, only on your own and in slow-motion, you can't get better than that man Payne.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Great urban environments
- ✓ Uncomplicated squad control
- ✓ Excellent music
- ✗ More than a little consoley
- ✗ Very simple gameplay
- ✗ God Bless America!

75

Mindless McCarthy-ism.
In a good way...

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WORMS 3D

■ £29.99 | Pub: Sega | Dev: Team 17 | ETA: November 14
www.worms3d.com

REQUIRES PIII 800, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card DESIRES PIII 1GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Earthworms, ringworms, wormholes: Will Porter loves them all. Especially when they've got guns. And are in 3D...

TIME PASSES and things change. Mountains disappear, civilizations rise and fall and what were once pixels with bazookas become three-dimensional pink things with bazookas. They're back, they're in 3D and they've got an exploding sheep with your name on it. Just as with previous *Worms* games, *Worms 3D* features several teams of worms with an arsenal of bizarre weapons at their disposal, who fight in a turn-based battle in which the enemy

must be drowned, exploded and burnt to death by throwing an assortment of weapons in their general direction. The game has always provoked inordinate amounts of lip-biting, gauging of wind speed and kicking of desks, but how has it fared in its transition to the third dimension?

THINK IN 3D

If you're a seasoned *Worms* hack, then initially the extra dimension is a bit worrying, and despite the pick-up-and-play *Worms* ethos, it takes you a while to figure out how to manoeuvre your warrior over the battlefield. You can see the action from three viewpoints: a spinning mouse-controlled camera, a first-person viewpoint for lobbing/firing your chosen armament and a wider birds-eye view of proceedings for strategic planning

and homing missile targeting. It's all fairly simple, but things like the new-fangled control you have over your worm's jumps take some getting used to. And *Worms* staples like the Ninja Rope suddenly need about eight keys and a basic education in rope-physics before they can be used successfully in swinging from platform to platform.

Compounding this, the third-person camera is liable to throw a few wobblers at you during your game, either presenting you with a close-up of a grassy hillock or schizophrenically swapping angles so that you get confused and accidentally saunter into a nearby landmine.

That's the snuffy games-journalist angle done and dusted. The good news is that these problems fade away the more you play and the more adept you become. Multiplayer is as enjoyable as it always has been, allowing for Internet

We will fight them on the beaches!



"Now Dave, about that pay rise..."

play, LAN games and the traditional huddle-around-the-monitor social interaction for which *Worms* is famous. Single-player, forever the bane of *Worms*-lovers, is the best that the series has seen.

GET AROUND

Whether you're parachuting your invertebrate from the top of a giant beanstalk, storming the Normandy beaches or protecting top-hat wearing worms in their Ewok-type village, the solo missions are invariably novel and entertaining, even though frustration and monitor-bashing are only ever a few heartbeats away. Victory means that maps are unlocked for multiplayer, so it's always worth it in the end.

There's no doubt the extra dimension adds a hell of a lot to the *Worms* experience. It's hugely satisfying to make vast craters in the destructible terrain, and the tight physics make parachutes

and jet-packs a fashionable means of transport for worms-about-town. The whole package is impeccably presented, endlessly customisable and contains music so good you'll be dancing on the rooftops. The switch to 3D isn't seamless, there are several bugs of the non-worm variety, but an old-school charm shines through that can't help but make you smile. **PC**

INPERSPECTIVE

LEMMINGS REVOLUTIONS

Reviewed Issue 91, Score 57%

Proof that not all classic 2D games can make the jump, the *Lemmings* tribes are now dead and buried.

WORMS WORLD PARTY

Reviewed Issue 101, Score 79%

Before *Worms 3D* the series was getting a little long in the tooth, but this was still great fun.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ It's *Worms*! And it's in 3D!
- ✓ Multiplayer as good as ever
- ✓ It charms your socks off
- ✗ Randomly created maps not great
- ✗ Fairly buggy

80

Not deep or clever, but immensely entertaining



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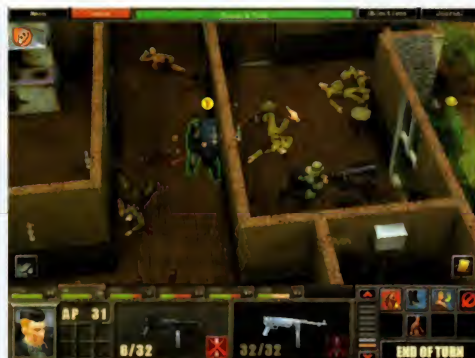


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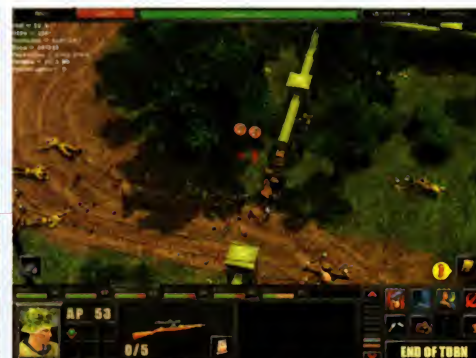
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You have to concentrate your firepower for results.



Don't use the door – blow the bloody walls up instead.



It's a long road to victory.

SILENT STORM

■ £29.99 | Pub: Bigben Interactive | Dev: Nival Interactive | ETA: Out Now | www.silentstorm-online.com

REQUIRES PIII 700, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card DESIRES PIII 1GHz, 256 MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

It's *X-COM* in jackboots. Steve O'Hagan shouts: lights, camera, action points...

THE ALLIES won WWII through a combination of greater intelligence, vast material resources, methodical strategy and superior action points.

Yes, the fact that our elite troops could move further, fire more accurately (and more often) and throw grenades over greater distances within a 60-second period was a deciding factor in

many a crucial encounter. Or at least it is in the many skirmishes of the entertaining, though ultimately disappointing, turn-based tactical workout *Silent Storm*.

ACTION POINT MAN

What we have is a WWII *Laser Squad* – *X-COM* with Tommy guns. Your troops have an allotment of 'action points' to expend each turn, when moving, firing etc, before the initiative then passes over to the enemy.

blood, and equipment litters the battle-scarred scene when it's all over – all under the glare of a rock-solid 3D engine.

The animations as your troops climb down through the hole you just blew in the floor, vault through the windows you just shattered or simply take aim and fire are fantastic, making this the best-looking game in its (battle)field. The fact that pretty much anything you see can be blown apart means your options are vast. You don't need doors if you've got enough

that sweet tactical balance that makes games of this genre so addictive, and neither does it have the strategic context that kept you up all night with the likes of *X-COM* and *Jagged Alliance*. The missions are too similar in construction. The enemy behaves too predictably, and is typically deployed in dribs and drabs across the map, meaning each mission turns into a bit of a dragnet-style trawl until they're all dead. The same tactics tend to win out, and early excitement

experience and choosing which special ability to upgrade, and which new weapon to arm provides intrigue. But otherwise there's little strategic meat to frame the tactical bones, least of all in the bafflingly banal, random encounter-filled trips your squad makes on the way to each mission zone.

There's a great game lurking here, but we reckon it needs a reworking to get it right. **PCZ**

INPERSPECTIVE

LASER SQUAD NEMESIS

Reviewed Issue 135, Score 87%

From Julian Gollop, the godfather of the genre, *LSN* shows how a turn-based game is done. Currently restricted to multiplayer, we hear they are working on a single-player campaign as we speak.

JAGGED ALLIANCE 2

Reviewed Issue 80, Score 80%

An often overlooked classic in the *Laser Squad* mould, out on budget, this offers serious bang for your buck. Funny, and with an in-depth strategic element, only a punishing difficulty level mars the total experience.

"The fact that pretty much anything you see can be blown apart means your options are vast"

Forget any thoughts of bland environments and static combatants that the phrase 'turn-based' may conjure up. In this world, bodies crumple with quasi ragdoll physics, windows shatter, bullets pepper walls with holes, woodwork is shattered by grenade blasts and

dynamite to blast through those walls. You don't need stairs if your grenade has carved a hole in the floor to the cellar.

STORM IN A TEACUP

All of which is great, but now for the sour grapes. Unfortunately, *Silent Storm* doesn't quite have

begins to give way to a feeling of frustrated disappointment around 10 missions in.

And similarly, what goes on between missions fails to captivate. Your squad of Allied or Axis specialists – snipers, engineers, medics and grenadiers – improves with

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Solid 3D engine
- ✓ Plenty of tactical options
- ✓ Destroyable terrain
- ✓ Levels lack diversity
- ✗ Stealth doesn't work too well
- ✗ Enemy too predictable

70

Honourable effort, but no medal

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MASSIVE ASSAULT

■ £29.99 | Pub: GMX Media | Dev: Wargaming.net | ETA: November 17

REQUIRES PIII 700, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card DESIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Steve O'Hagan finds this shallow battle game a little offensive

THINKING THIS was a CD by a bunch of pre-eminent Bristol trip-hoppers, we were slightly disappointed to find *Massive Assault* is in fact a very basic turn-based strategy game.

Very much in the mould of the *Battle Isle* series and the Game Boy Advance's hugely popular *Advance Wars* (without coming anywhere near to the addictiveness of either), *Massive Assault*'s extremely simplistic approach to strategy gaming will doubtless leave more cerebral PC wargamers cold. Units move and then they fire, that's about it. There are no defence values, just an attack strength for the attacker and some hit points for

the defender. Which means, tactically speaking, it's all about making sure as many of your units that can attack, do attack.

Like *Z: Steel Soldiers*, the game revolves around territories, the control of which lets you build new units. And this is what gives the game the small amount of interest it has. If an enemy unit is within the borders of one of your territories then it can't produce, and vice versa. So stringently protecting the borders of each of your domains is chief among your concerns. As the combat system is so rudimentary, all your strategic thinking is poured into which territories to invade, which to

defend and which to declare as your secret ally, giving the whole thing at least a fleeting allure.

A crude 3D engine suffices in the graphics department, and there are plenty of gameplay options, the more free-form *World Domination* being the most involving. It's easy to get into, and is pacey despite being turn-based. Great for younger players or maybe for a quick thrash out over the Internet, but a little too simplistic for those who want more meat. Which includes us.

PCZONE VERDICT 41
Strategy ultra-lite



Both sides get the same selection of pitifully few unit types.



It all looks pleasant enough, but gameplay is very limited.

SQUAD ASSAULT: WEST FRONT

■ £29.99 | Pub: GMX Media | Dev: Freedom Games | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 700, 256MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card DESIRES PIII 1GHz, 312MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Close Combat goes 3D – again, and only Steve O'Hagan stands in its way



Off-map artillery support and air strikes can be called upon.



Troops will disobey orders if they panic.

SQUAD ASSAULT

is WWII gaming guru Eric Young's latest effort to bring the highly realistic tactical combat system that powered his classic *Close Combat* series into 3D. But like *GI Combat* before it (also set in Normandy, 1944), *Squad Assault* has to go down as an heroic failure.

The weapons, vehicles, tactical principles and the chaos of war are all there, captured by a passable 3D engine that can be zoomed, panned and rotated at will, but the game is

beset by coding problems that ruin any enjoyment.

The game is a real-time combat sim where troops operate in realistically composed squads and are supported by tanks, mortars, flamethrowers, field guns and the like. Line of sight is vital, and troops react realistically when they come under fire, with soldiers cowering, routing and even surrendering when put under pressure.

But unfortunately tanks spot men crawling through

hedgerows from ridiculous distances, squads ordered to defend houses spill out on to the lawns, and the command interface is sluggish and unresponsive. What's more, the AI is diabolical, with the computer placing all its defending troops in wide-open spaces ready to be butchered, and operating in ridiculous flocks when on the offensive.

Undoubtedly, if Mr Young could harness an effective 3D engine while capturing the elegantly simple yet enormously in-depth tactical realism of his much-missed *Close Combat* games, then we would have something special on our hands. But, sadly, it seems this calls for more resources than are apparently at the great man's disposal. In multiplayer it's better, but with such fundamental issues with the gameplay and so many technical problems, you only need play a couple of missions to accept Mr Young has a long way to go to realise his 3D vision.

PCZONE VERDICT 58
Promising, though deeply flawed



Poor AI is *Squad Assault*'s greatest downfall.

MADDEN NFL 2004

■ £29.99 | Pub: EA | Dev: EA Sports | ETA: Out Now

CRIMINAL. No, not the usual rant about EA Sports' tri-weekly update policy, but the lack of understanding that American Football receives in UK gaming mags. Why, if I had my way Yankee Rugby would be on covers, getting six-page previews, player profiles and... (Get on with it - Ed)

In this latest version, what most stands out for the ardent *Madden* fan isn't the brand new Playmaker system or the updated franchise modes (including a not-as-exciting-as-it-sounds stadium builder). No, it's the lack of pizzazz. The

flim-flammy, shim-shammy, razzle-dazzle that's shown throughout the console versions.

Where are the heart-beat force feedback moments when a play comes off perfectly, the 24-style split screen replays, the Madden Challenges and collectable cards? Don't we deserve your love too, EA? Other than that though, this is the best American Football title to date on the PC.

Paul Presley

PCZONE VERDICT

80



"No, don't leave me. I can change."



Ship-to-ship combat is fun for a while, though pretty basic.

TORTUGA: PIRATES OF THE NEW WORLD

■ £29.99 | Pub: Bigben | Dev: Ascaron | ETA: Out Now

IN WHAT we can only imagine is a shameless attempt to cash in on the worldwide success of *Pirates Of The Caribbean* at the cinema, developer Ascaron has re-mixed its recent pirates and trading sim *Port Royale* to come up with this pirates and trading sim *Tortuga: Pirates Of The New World*.

The graphics are the same, the game map is the same, the combat system is the same, the trading mechanics are the same. All that's really changed is that the

game is now more scenario-based and combat-heavy, with less resource management. Missions involve taking over enemy towns and carrying out tasks for friendly governors. *Port Royale* was a promising though confused trading sim, but this watered-down revision does little to advance the cause. Copying your own game? We thought piracy was illegal.

Steve O'Hagan

PCZONE VERDICT

40



Defy the congestion charge and travel by ferry.

SIMCITY 4: RUSH HOUR

■ £19.99 | Pub: Electronic Arts | Dev: Maxis | ETA: Out Now

MAXIS HAS done a pretty good job of beefing *SimCity 4* up with a host of patches, but this first proper expansion pack deals with introducing a variety of new transportation options and tools.

Features like monorails and ferries will help ease the congestion levels. You can now click on any road or building and get a breakdown of how your commuters are using it, which proves very handy. There are also a few new buildings to erect in your city, including tollbooths, so you

can squeeze every penny you can out of your city's commuters. Nice.

You can also fly, drive and sail around your city completing missions and seeing what life is like in your sprawling metropolis, something that was sadly absent from the original. A comprehensive pack that'll keep the fans happy for many months to come.

Rhianna Pratchett

PCZONE VERDICT

79

HAEGEMONIA: THE SOLON HERITAGE

■ £19.99 | Pub: Digital Reality | Dev: Wanadoo | ETA: Out Now

CRUELY forgotten and overlooked, space-based RTS *Haegemonia* (Issue 124, Score 82%) was an accomplished and sleek RTS that successfully combined the 3D space action of *Homeworld* with a rewarding - if somewhat hackneyed - story set around the galactic turmoil between Earth, its colonies and the usual alien races from the back of beyond.

Although tactically it left much to be desired, exploring the countless research options and putting the game's unique Hero units to work made it more than worthwhile, and it appears enough people felt the same way to warrant an add-on.

Digital Reality is renowned for its cut-scenes, however *Solon Heritage*

not only lacks them, it also has no new campaign either. Instead, what you get are 15 scenarios for both skirmish and multiplayer games and the usual assortment of added units and abilities - 50 in all.

It's a decent enough package, the scenarios are varied and challenging and the tweaks - to both the graphics and the gameplay - will please the game's fans. Saying that, there's little to tempt newcomers into the fold, so we can only predict that with *Homeworld 2* on the scene, *Haegemonia* will slip back into a quiet and undeserved obscurity.

Richie Shoemaker

PCZONE VERDICT

77



Battles are bigger and better.

Haegemonia: overlooked by many.

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BATTLEFIELD 1942: DELUXE EDITION

■ £39.99 | Pub: EA | ETA: November 14

HERE WE HAVE the original *Battlefield 1942* and *The Road To Rome* expansion pack united together for the first time in one super-absorbent travel pack... what else is there to add?

For those that don't already know, *BF1942* is one of the hottest games on planet Multiplayer FPS, and although the single-player game was little more than an extended tutorial with processor-hungry (and incredibly stupid) AI, online it's one of the best shooters you can play.

The setting is, of course, WWII and both games are surprisingly different in scope. *BF1942* is a hit-and-miss compilation of famous battles that features a vast variety

of superb weapons, tanks, ships and aircraft. *The Road To Rome* features dogged infantry assaults across more focused locales with a decent spread of new equipment to play around with.

Obviously it's a shame – but totally unsurprising – that the new *Secret Weapons* add-on wasn't included, but for those who have yet to experience the series, this represents decent value – especially, it goes without saying, if you have a fat broadband pipe and want to fill it with hot gaming love.

Richie Shoemaker

PCZONE VERDICT

85

"BF1942 is one of the hottest games on planet Multiplayer FPS"



"OK Jeeves, I'm ready. Pull!"



"For a great deal on surplus military vey-icles, always bank on Hank's Tanks."

THE SIMS: DOUBLE DELUXE

■ £34.99 | Pub: EA | ETA: Out Now



The Sims chart domination goes on and on and on...



WHAT DO Westlife, Black Eyed Peas and *The Sims* have in common? They stick to the top end of the charts like shit. Which is ironic really, because for the 'factories' that produced them, they are pure gold.

Creator of *The Sims* Will Wright and his team at Maxis could retire to their own islands by now thanks to the success of the series. Instead we're condemned to see *Sims* expansions, sequels and expansions to sequels outsell more deserving games for all eternity.

This deluxe version features the original game and the *Live'n' Large* and *House Party* expansion packs. The first offers five new career paths, retro and medieval buildings and alien visitations. The second lets you invite your

neighbours over to parties, where you can gush, babble and dance as you try to make friends (or enemies).

It's all incredibly enjoyable for a day or two, and there are millions out there who play it to death. But just as Westlife fans know little of true pop and BEP fans know little of true hip-hop, so hardcore *Sims* fanatics often know little of other, more compelling games. The original *Sims* is well worth checking out, but this package, given the poor quality of the two expansion packs, is purely for the would-be *Sims* completist. Meanwhile, turn back to page 36 for our preview of *The Sims 2*.

Mark Hill

PCZONE VERDICT

67



Tribes 2 still has a strong hardcore following, but we'd take *BF1942* any day.

TRIBES 2

■ £4.99 | Pub: Xplosiv | ETA: November 7

TRIBES WAS the game that took deathmatching outside – great news for claustrophobics, bad news for anyone with a peanut-sized processor. Huge maps with far-reaching panoramic views lunched on frame rates and, with the sequel's trick graphics, new vehicles and a wider range of weaponry, you needed a mad skills machine to experience the game without those mid-battle pauses. Of course, today's hardware points and laughs at it. Gameplay is super slick – the largest, most demanding arenas are delivered in motion picture smoothness, even if everything does look angular and slightly past it. Then again, that never stopped *Counter-Strike*.

There are eight multiplayer variants and up to 64 players per game, although most servers cater

for half that number and rarely stray from Capture the Flag. And that's where *Tribes 2* begins to feel, well, kind of ho-hum – even if it is under a fiver.

The popularity of *Battlefield 1942* means that fighting *alfresco* on monster maps, with multi-manned vehicles and stirring draw distances, has become *de rigueur* for the most of us, and every other shooter on sale has a gentler learning slope – *Tribes* looks easy but isn't. Added to which, almost all of the 350 online games are hosted in the USA, complete with unacceptable pings and brash, order-barking Americans who play it too much. But if you understand its myriad rules and like to feel part of a team, it's still a very compelling alternative.

Phil Wand

PCZONE VERDICT

76



Touched by the Hand Of NOD. In 3D too.

COMMAND & CONQUER: RENEGADE

■ £9.99 | Pub: EA | ETA: Out Now

IT'S IRONIC that we were due to review *Breed* this issue, only for it to slip again, because *Renegade* is very much in the same league: first-person action and a spread of vehicles to control – all of it rather uninspired and more than a little frustrating.

The C&C setting makes this a much more friendlier game to get to grips with than *Breed*, and seeing all the familiar buildings and vehicles from the RTS in 3D does induce a warm glow of nostalgia. But this soon fades, leaving a storyline that drags, characters you want to punch in the face and an arsenal of weapons that are limp and ineffectual.

Thankfully the multiplayer game was much more worthy of the C&C name, and

even today *Renegade*'s online game remains unique and surprisingly popular despite the increasing numbers of people migrating to the likes of *Battlefield 1942*. Patches have included new vehicles and mods are still being released, so the game still has plenty of life left in it.

Renegade is more for the multiplayer crowd and the rabid C&C fans, but for FPS virgins, it's a decent enough introduction to the genre. But for the rest, there are sure to be other cut-price shooters available that you missed first time around, *Clive Barker's Undying* being a cruelly overlooked prime example.

Richie Shoemaker

PCZONE VERDICT

69

ARCANUM: OF STEAMWORKS & MAGICK OBSCURA

■ £4.99 | Pub: Xplosiv | ETA: November 7

IN A WORLD where technology and magic eke out an uneasy co-existence, plot developments and character-building options are always going to be plentiful, and in these areas *Arcanum* (an isometric RPG) never disappoints. Featuring huge cities and towns to rival some of the best in the *Baldur's Gate* series, detailed objects and environments to match, *Arcanum* has to be one of the most epic RPGs we've ever played. The combat system allows for both real-time and turn-based battles, while the plot is involved and engrossing.

Arcanum offers something for everyone, and to a large extent it succeeds. Magic users have many schools of magic to toy around with, and those who prefer to specialise in technological skills will find plenty of gadgets to keep them occupied for a very long time.



Dated, but still damned good.

Graphically it's showing its age a little, and it must be said that the combat can prove somewhat clunky. But if you're looking for a new RPG to sink your teeth into and this neat little number has somehow escaped your attention, now is as good a time as any to give it a whirl.

Chris Anderson

PCZONE VERDICT

79

RE-RELEASES

THRONE OF DARKNESS

■ £4.99 | Pub: Xplosiv | ETA: November 7

DEVELOPED BY several members of the original *Diablo* team, *Throne Of Darkness* is a much more sophisticated beast. Instead of the traditional Westernised fantasy setting, the backdrop of the game is a pretty, if static, depiction of feudal Japan.

Commanding a team of seven samurai (all with their own strengths and weaknesses), you must hack and slash your way through a set of frenetic and combat-heavy missions. And while it may not be quite as manic as *Diablo*, there's little to choose between the two.

The battles are intense, but they're far from brainless, and selecting the correct team formation for each fight is essential if you're to survive for any respectable length of time.

There are other nice touches too, like the way you can fashion unique new weapons and armour from the hardware



Spells are based on the four elements.

left behind by your vanquished opponents. Sadly, though, the Manga-style cut-scenes are twee and irritating, but if you're tired of *Diablo II*, then *Throne Of Darkness* is definitely the game for you.

Rhianna Pratchett

PCZONE VERDICT

80

LEFTOVERS

PLEASE SIR, CAN I HAVE SOME MORE SIR?

While the dregs of the budget releases are paraded around ZONE HQ, a soulful violin plays; this is their final dance, a last-gasp attempt to ingratiate themselves before they are locked away, chained down and forgotten.

First out is *Freedom Force Classic* (£9.99, EA, Out Now), a diamond in the rough with isometric superhero capers, puzzles and car-lifting abilities. It's still a good game so we'll give it 75 per cent and bid it farewell.

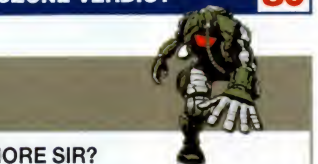
Next out of the cage is *Batman: Vengeance* (£9.99, Focus, Out Now). We sneer and shout, "What are you doing back here? Remember your camera angles? You're rubbish!" Some of the more delinquent members of the team start throwing bricks. 34 per cent.

Capitalism II (£9.99, Focus, Out Now) enters the arena hand in hand with *Settlers IV* (£9.99, Focus, Out Now), blinking in the daylight. With its ocean-deep complexity we stare at *Capitalism II* in abject confusion and give it a baffled 40 per cent. To its soulmate, with its cute little people, acute resource management and engrossing gameplay we award 72 per cent. We then separate the pair with our handy ZONE cattle prod, ignoring their pleas for mercy.

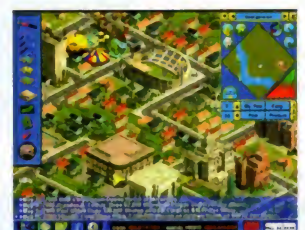
Two more games are led out. 3 *Hoyles: Card, Casino And Board Games* (Xplosiv, £4.99, November 7) looks forlorn, its card games and tomfoolery being far more appreciated across the pond. We feel a rare rush of pity and give it 58 per cent. *Shanghai: Great Moments* (Xplosiv, £4.99, November 7) mutters something about eastern winds and mahjong. But, only partly convinced, we award it 60 per cent.

Finally, *Pearl Harbor* (Xplosiv, £4.99, November 7) limps into view. Its quasi-flight sim structure, piss-poor graphics and general insignificance makes some of the team start to cry. We give it 39 per cent, before kicking it down the cellar steps into eternal darkness.

Will Porter



Pearl Harbor.



Capitalism II.



Freedom Force Classic.



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FEEDBACK

Martin Korda delves into the mailbag to sort through your views on the latest batch of games to hit the shelves

IT'S YOUR SHOUT

Feedback is here to offer you a platform to have your say about games we've reviewed over the past three issues. Whether you totally agree or utterly disagree with us, we want to hear from you. And all you have to do to get your views in print is send an email to letters@pczone.co.uk with 'Feedback' in the subject line. Please try and keep your views to less than 100 words. Anything longer will not be considered or may have to be edited for size.

HOMEWORLD 2

REVIEWED ISSUE: 134
SCORE: 81%

What we thought:

Some will dismiss it as too similar to its predecessor, but on the whole, *HW2* has enough ideas, detail and challenging qualities to keep even the deadliest space strategist entertained for a long, long time.

What you said:

I have a few problems with this game. Use of components is minimal and there are restrictive limits on the number of ships. However, my main problem is with the lack of difficulty settings, which makes the game too easy for those who've completed *Homeworld*.

It took three days of sporadic playing for me to finish the game, with only two levels requiring a second attempt to complete. Overall there are some decent ideas and there's more distinction between the two sides, but it could have been so much more.

Thomas Whiteway

I remember the first *Homeworld* really blew my socks off. I've never been the biggest strategy fan in the world but it was the swirling 3D spaceships that lured me in. Naturally I was hoping that *Homeworld 2* would give me that same buzz but, to be honest, I felt let down. I'm not saying it's a bad game, just that it's not that different from the first. At least not so much that I felt justified in paying another 30-odd quid for it.

System1

Comment:

It's always a shame when a sequel fails to adequately build on the original. Sadly, *Homeworld 2* does just that, faithfully tweaking its predecessor without offering enough new ideas to really get excited about. A missed opportunity unfortunately, but still excellent stuff.

TRON 2.0

REVIEWED ISSUE: 134
SCORE: 83%

What we thought:

If you want a break from the usual FPS dirge, you'd do well to check this game out. It's more fun than it looks.

What you said:

Tron 2.0 is tactical and challenging, the atmosphere is perfect and the disc weapon means you can't just barge into a room and hose everything down in a hail of machine-gun fire.

The level layout also seems genius, allowing you to hide in little nooks and crannies but never getting too lost.

I'm going away this afternoon for



Like it or lump it, we reckon *Jedi Academy* is essential gaming.

"I thought I was about halfway through the whole game when the credits started rolling"

SLOTH82

the weekend and I'm thinking it's a shame that I'm not going to be able to play *Tron* for a few days, and that has to be one of the best things I can ever say about any game.

dannyfranks

It may look weird, it may not be your usual shooter material and the weapons may be very different from what you're used to (especially the disc), but *Tron 2.0* is one of the best shooters of the year. Don't judge it by how it looks. Buy it, because it rocks.

Paul Butler

Comment:

The adage (which I'm about to make up) of 'Don't always judge a game by its screenshots' has never applied more than it does to *Tron 2.0*. Granted, it may look somewhat 'alternative', but the gameplay, RPG elements and superbly

crafted storyline make this a must-have shooter.

STAR WARS JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY

REVIEWED ISSUE: 133
SCORE: 89%

What we thought:

If being a saber-wielding Jedi is what *Star Wars* is all about, then this could very well be the best *Star Wars* game ever.

What you said:

I loved this game. The Force Powers and the three lightsaber styles make it a thousand times more enjoyable than *Jedi Outcast*, while the lightsaber battles themselves are really exciting and challenging. I hope they stick with the same format for the next game, it's a winning formula.

Mark Peterson

I think *Academy* has some totally uninspiring levels. All of the locations look nearly identical and dull. Also, the game is way too short. I only

played it in one-hour bursts because I got bored quickly, but still managed to complete it in approximately five-and-a-half hours, of which only about two hours was actual action. The rest of the time you wander around looking for a switch or lever to press. Whoever designed the levels should be shot.

Also, the ending was probably the worst I've seen. OK, computer games rarely have great endings but this just took the piss. I thought I was only about halfway through the whole game when the credits started rolling. I couldn't believe it.

SLOTH82

Jedi Academy is a great game, with some brilliant touches, intense atmosphere and a pretty good storyline. I thoroughly enjoyed this game and would recommend it to anyone, even if you don't like *Star Wars* very much.

P Varga

Comment:

Last month you didn't have a bad word to say about *Jedi Academy*. This month you have a few. Oh well, no game's perfect eh, but we believe *Jedi Academy* has a damn good try. So good, in fact, we nearly gave it a Classic award. [X]



Homeworld 2: more of an add-on than a sequel?

ONLINE ZONE

AWAY YOU GO



■ ONLINE EDITOR: Paul Presley

▲ Remember the future (oxymoronical as that sounds)? I don't mean *Star Trek* and all that "polarised warp coils off the starboard bow" malarkey. I mean the one that Peter Snow and Philippa Forrester (or for our older viewers, Raymond Baxter and Judith Hann) promised us on *Tomorrow's World*. Virtual Reality letting us all watch doctors perform keyhole surgery from our own homes. Or going to meetings with the Tokyo office while, get this, STILL IN LONDON!!! And the games. According to library research (ie a dog-eared copy of *Neuromancer*), every possibility was open to us. Want to joust in a medieval tournament? Simply flick the switch and you'd enter the 'Medieval Tourney' portalgate and take on The Black Knight (Kevin from Droitwich). Want to battle in space? Another switch-flicking and you're Major Bent Strangely leading your chums on another successful penetration of Uranus.

So what happened? Where is this fabled fun palace? This virtual paradise? This gargantuan global gleamagorium, if you will? Well it is kind of out there, but you wouldn't know it since all anybody seems to want to do in the MMOG world is hit pixies with swords. That's why Online Zone exists. Multiplayer gaming is more than just *EverQuest* and *Counter-Strike*. I'd warrant you could pretty much find an online environment catering to any pastime you'd care to mention (yes, even those ones). OK, *FXGolf* isn't much cop (see page 120), but at least it's trying. But it's also up to you. Thus my commandment is as follows: seek out the strange, the offbeat and the different and embrace them. Together, my children, we shall carve out a brave new virtual world. Or die trying.

Germany dominates the

A EURO NIGHTMARE FOR THE GALLANT GAMING GIRLS OF GREAT BRITAIN

THE EURO CYBER Games, held on the last weekend of September, promised to be a magnificent showcase of gamers warming up for the World Cyber Games in Korea. With teams from all over Europe, the world's press was on hand to witness a spectacle of Olympian proportions. At least, that was the plan.

For the past three years, the World Cyber Games has been gathering the world's best gamers via regional tournaments, then flying the elite out to Korea for a big-money Grand Final. This year the prize fund was a whopping £240,000. For any of the European teams to stand a chance, they would first have to come through the Euro Finals in Paris.

At 6.30am on Saturday, the players were turfed out of bed followed by journalists being kicked out of the bar. And then Sod's Law struck. For some reason, no one had actually checked the network. Or the PCs. In fact, everything was SNAFU in a big way. Eleven hours later, it was still down.

Starreh, one of the girls from the female British team, Clan SCEE, summed it up succinctly: "This is crap and I'm bored." Rumours circulated ranging from the plausible to libellous. But one rumour standing out above all others was this – the entire event was pointless. You see, although all the different European teams



The German domination of football continues. Even in the virtual world.

finalists were male. So when the Spanish team rang and asked if they could send a girl team along with them for fun, Samsung said: "OK, you pay the travel

world, but it was good of Samsung to organise something.

Finally, at around 8pm on the Saturday, following a weekend of twiddling thumbs, the network was repaired and the event got underway. With the thought of watching boys play games in a foreign country to inspire them, Clan SCEE put up an impressive fight and came second in their group, qualifying for the quarter-finals. But then Sod's Law struck again as due to the lack of time, the actual qualifying heats were cut drastically. The quarter-finals were cancelled and group winners went straight into the semis, eliminating the UK girls. All in all, a rotten end to a rotten day.

"The world's press was on-hand to witness a spectacle of Olympian proportions. At least that was the plan"

were playing in Paris, they would all go to Korea, no matter what the result in France. The only thing 'unique' about the Euro World Games was the addition of the girl teams. When Samsung ran the qualifiers, rather unsurprisingly, all the

and we'll put them up in a hotel." Other teams followed suit and eventually there was a sub-league of girl players competing for the grand prize of... flying out to Korea and watching the boys play. Hardly the most awe-inspiring prize in the



Multiplayer *Halo* gets its first public outing.



Light relief as gamepads give way to wadaiko drummers.



114
TIME OF DEFIANCE
The world's first MMORTSG?



118
HALO
The multiplayer marvel reviewed



126
GETTING STARTED IN...
Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory



131
NEVERQUEST
Steve Hill has A Tale In The Desert

World Cyber Games



The victorious Germans. How nice for them.



The British girls keeping their spirits high.



Clan SCEE show their patriotic side.

With the Parisian nightmare behind them, The World Finals proved to be far better organised affair for the WCG. Held once again in Seoul, South Korea, with 600 of the world's best competing across eight different games, from *Halo* to *Counter-Strike* to *FIFA* to a bizarre Korean Government-sponsored game called *Survival Project*.

Annoyingly the Germans pretty much dominated everything (*FIFA* included), with the Brits being knocked out in the quarter-finals by South Korea. Overall, we finished ninth in the medals. The results are at www.worldcybergames.com. Let's hope next year our girls get a chance to prove their true worth as the event moves to sunny San Francisco.

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

WHY PAY TO PLAY WHEN THE INTERWEB PROVIDES FUN FOR FREE?



INSULT SWORDFIGHTING
(www.scummba.com/community/games/swordfighting)

"Hurrrrrhh..." And a bit of drool at the corner of the mouth. Thus was the state I was reduced to when someone sent me the link to the *Monkey Island Insult Sword Fighting Game*. Long-term reprobates will need no further details than the link above. For many of us long-timers, this particular piece of design genius has NEVER been bettered. Not by your *Half-Lives*, your *Deus Exes*, nor even your *Hugo Smakkaballs*.

You knew where you were with the early LucasArts games. For one, they were genuinely funny. For two, they were ground-breakingly original in both content design and execution. For, er, three, they were funny (I think I mentioned that). And for four, they had Ron Gilbert, comedy mastermind, at the helm. While many will argue the merits of *Monkey Island 2* over the original (as well as *Fate Of Atlantis* Indy over *Last Crusade* Indy) – these people are wrong. Wrong, wrong, wrong. As wrong as a German-speaking Frenchman.



A three-headed monkey?

For the uneducated, this was the pivotal moment in the far superior first game in which wannabe-pirate and perennial loser Guybrush Threepwood discovers that the secret to fine swordsmanship isn't with the wrist but with the wit. Successful banter is the key. He calls you a scoundrel, you call him a cur. Only funnier.

Converted to the web by a die-hard team of *Monkey Island* fanboys, this version of the game requires finding the right response to your opponent's cutting jibe, a task that's not always as simple as it sounds. Sure, there's a bug that renders the whole thing instantly solvable, but where's the fun in that? This is a game for the connoisseur of fine sarcasm and hearty pirate speak. Ye scurvy swabs.

ONLINE SHORTS

GLEANNING THE FACTS FROM THE GLOBAL RUMOUR MILL



AO ON TRIAL

Following the rave reviews and positive consumer feedback for the *Anarchy Online: Shadowlands* expansion, Funcom is returning the favour by offering a free seven-day trial for newcomers to the sci-fi world. Sign up by logging on to www.anarchy-online.com and get into the futuristic RPG mayhem for yourself.



DARKSPACE OFFER

Still on the free trial front, *DarkSpace Online*, Palestar's massively multiplayer space-based RTS, is offering five-day free play coupons for players wanting to explore its dark universe of "political infighting, economic sanctions and diplomatic posturing". Download the game and sign up at www.darkspace.net.



AUTO ASSAULT

Jumpgate might not have packed a sufficient enough punch to counter the behemoth that is *EVE Online*, but it's still garnering a decent-sized fanbase. Good news for developer NetDevil then, as it announces *Auto Assault* – a brand new MMOG ideal for lovers of post-apocalyptic, *Mad Max*-style road duels.



MAX MODS UP

While *Max Payne 2* receives all the plaudits we can throw (see page 74), the modding community is getting to grips with the freely available mod tools recently released by Rockstar Games. Head over to www.rockstargames.com to find tools, map editors and everything else you could need to warp Max's world and ease his Payne.



A developer's work is never done. Ever.

DEVELOPER DIARY



DRAGON EMPIRES

PETER TYSON, Codemasters

"I get a lot of questions asking how I got into the games industry and how others can follow in my footsteps, so I thought I'd pass on a few pearls of wisdom. Copying my route would be very difficult. For starters, you'd have to live in New Zealand for 20 or so years, do a mish-mash of university courses and then have a sister working in the company you eventually joined.

"The biggest real tip I can give is to get well qualified and gain some experience through the Mod community. Creating a portfolio of projects will put you head and shoulders above a lot of new graduates who want to get into games and it teaches you a lot about game development. Also, check out developer websites like ours (www.codemasters.co.uk/jobs), which have some guides for wannabe game developers.

"If that's your thing then you'll be quite jealous of what we're working on now. Three of us are currently building the quest system and it's proving a lot of fun. Planning the structure of each quest and then each line of dialogue is taxing our brains more than we normally like.

"Do you help the demented ghost or solve the problems it's causing?"

"We're trying to create quests which really make the player think about their decisions. Do you help the demented ghost or try and solve the problems it's causing? Do you help thieves steal from the merchant or report them to the guards? We think decisions and choices like this make for interesting quests and remove the drudgery of delivering notes or killing rats.

"What makes it more fun is that the three of us are also a little subversive. We like quests that poke fun at some of the fantasy clichés. For example, you won't have to kill rats in the pub cellar, but you might be given a padded stick to knock out as many as possible in 30 seconds. You won't buy a rumour off the barman either; instead, he might be asking you for rumours as he wants to go off adventuring! Having quests that are a little different will greatly add to the game and make things more fun. Plus, it reflects the slightly different approach we take with *Dragon Empires* as a whole. Until next month..."



NO EURO CHOCOBO

FINAL FANTASY ONLINE FINALLY ONLINE... IN THE USA



Little and Large: the unseen later years.



Time to turn your lights off... Er, on. Damn.

IT EITHER LEAVES you colder than Jim Davidson's social standing, or it fills you with such a warm and fuzzy glow you might as well be made of felt. Either way, the *Final Fantasy* series has been a staple of role-players' gaming lives ever since it first appeared on your console machines.

The next logical step in the series, a MMOG set in one of the many extravagantly graphic worlds brainfarted by the team at Square Enix, was extensively previewed back in issue 133. All that was missing then was a firm release date for the game. Not anymore.

As of October 28, the first non-Japanese *Final Fantasy XI* PC servers

went live, for North American chocobo farmers only. In a bundle that includes the *Rise Of The Zilart* expansion pack, US gamers were able to enter the world of Vana'diel and join the many PlayStation 2 FF-fans already enjoying the cross-platform adventures.

Fifty dollars, plus a further \$12.95 monthly subscription fee (plus \$1 per character created) is all it costs the American gamer to get with the programme. Handily, though, every subscription comes with a 30-day free trial, so online turn-based warriors can get a chance to try before they buy (rumours that the more complicated combat animations take around a month to complete are unfounded).

All of which is great news for those with import contacts and the tolerance for non-European server connections. As for the large chunk of the world that lies in between Japan and the Americas (us, you dolt), there's still no official word of any kind of European roll-out. We shouldn't have to wait for too long, though. No global conglomerate can resist the lure of our readily-available cash for too long. Soon, we too can share in the dream with Uncle Sam.

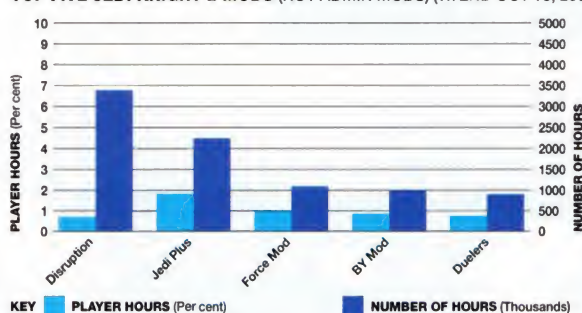
- Publisher: Sony
- Developer: Square Enix
- ETA: TBC
- Website: www.playonline.com/ff11us

STATZONE

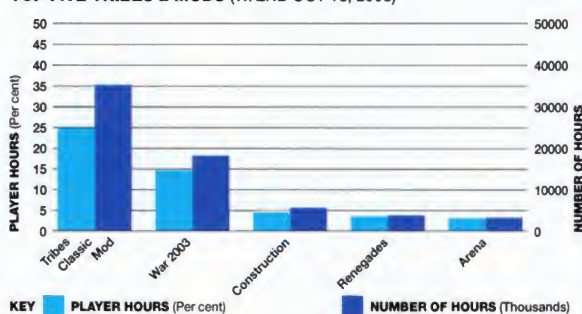
A LOOK AT THE DATA SHAPING YOUR ONLINE WORLD

ALL DATA SUPPLIED BY:
ESPORTS.net

TOP FIVE JEDI KNIGHT 2 MODS (NOT ADMIN MODS) (W/END OCT 13, 2003)



TOP FIVE TRIBES 2 MODS (W/END OCT 13, 2003)



MOST POPULAR GAMING NAMES
(MONTH ENDING OCTOBER 13, 2003)



WELCOME TO MY WORLD...

BILL TROST, *EverQuest II*

SO, HOW DO you rebuild the most popular online world of all time? Apparently it's all about the wallpaper. No, really. "Different wallpapers, paint jobs and so on are all things you have to earn, either through general or specific questing," says *EverQuest II* lead designer Bill Trost. Before the likes of Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen et al start descending on the world of MMOGs like vultures on a pop culture corpse, we're not exactly talking your B&O/Homebase lilac and puce striped specials or anything. "If you want orc-skin wallpaper, for instance," explains Trost, "you'd have to go out and slay a bunch of orcs, then bring their skins to a player-artisan who could turn it into wallpaper for you."

One of the keys to drawing players and their guilds into the new Norrath is to provide customisable home bases, with prosperous organisations apparently getting the plushiest of pads. "Some of the more prominent structures in each city are the Guild


houses," says Trost. "The player-owned buildings can range from simple single-level apartments all the way up to multi-storey penthouses."

EverQuest II mainly centres around the rebirth of the two great Norrathian cities following an unspecified cataclysm. Both Qeynos and Freeport have had a major reinvention, with Trost barely able to contain his delight at their progress. "Both in art and design, these cities are shaping up to be the most incredible fantasy cities I have ever seen," he enthuses. "I can't wait to start my Ratonga Assassin and skulk about the Freeport sewers and alleyways."

Trost is hoping to extend this quality far beyond the city walls. "Our artists and designers take their cues from tons of different sources," he says, "but really nature has been our best visual model for *EQII*. We have a very realistic look and feel that makes the fantastic and magical elements that much more pronounced and

believable. Our artists just keep outdoing themselves with these environments."

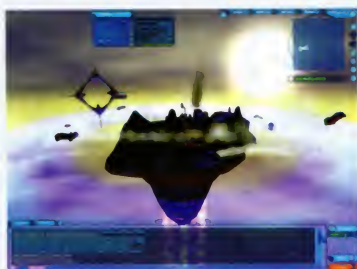
One of the big arguments in the MMOG world is zoning-versus-single load worlds. Trost's team at Sony is firmly in favour of the former. "We can present a more diverse sense of 'place' by focusing on zone-based architecture. If we're making a swamp, we only have to focus on making it a really good swamp. We don't have to divert resources by saying, 'It's a really good swamp over here, but it has to be kind of a desert over here to tie in.' It enables us to have a higher sense of detail in the places we choose to do."

EQII's other goal is to create a world rich with content and style. "Our artists and designers are filling every corner of Norrath with interesting details and adventure hooks for both the experienced online role-player and the complete novice," says Trost. You only have to look at the first *EverQuest* to realise he means it. Half a million online adventurers can't be wrong. 

"Both in art and design, Qeynos and Freeport are shaping up to be the most incredible fantasy cities I have ever seen"

BILL TROST *EVERQUEST II*

■ **Publisher:** Ubisoft
■ **Developer:** Sony Online Entertainment
■ **ETA:** 2004
■ **Website:** www.everquest2.com



Island in the sun.



This Island Earth.



This sceptred isle.



Sleepless fights...

TIME OF DEFIANCE

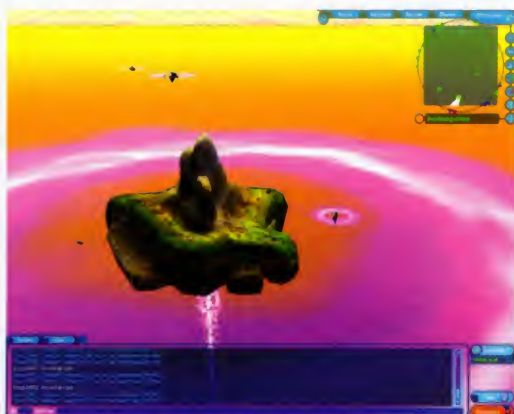
THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER Oxygen Interactive
DEVELOPER Nicely
 Crafted Entertainment
ETA Q4 2003
WEBSITE www.nicelycrafted.com

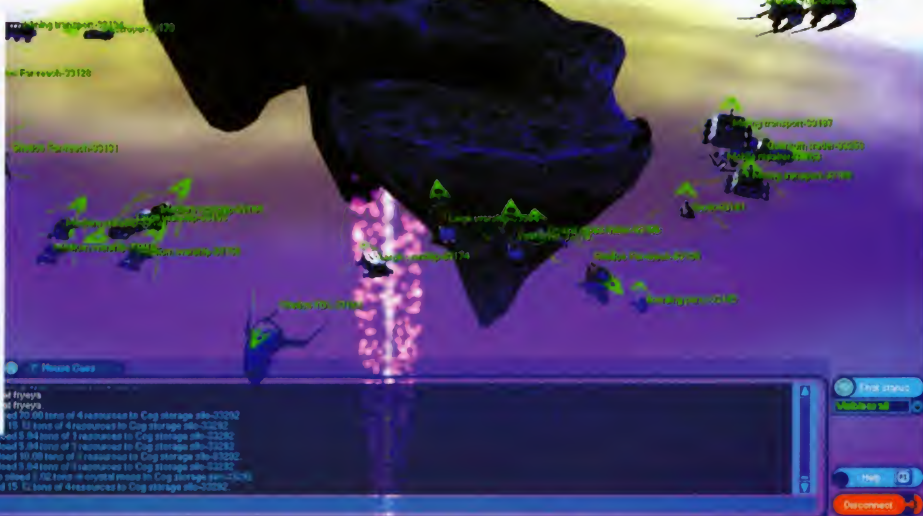
WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Up to 1,000 players in each 28-day game
- Absolutely giant playing area
- Real diplomacy with real people
- Can be played with a mere 28K modem

David Blaine may have sat in a box without food for 44 days, but **Will Porter** has discovered an online community that goes without sleep for 28...



Isle be back. (You're fired - Ed)



Isle of Lesbos. (So very fired - Ed)

A MILLION years ago, a bunch of scientists destroyed their planet's crust and had to replace it with a flotilla of anti-gravity islands. Luckily for us this tragedy spawned an online RTS that now causes sleep deprivation, agoraphobia and unpleasant body odour among a legion of die-hard strategy-heads – and will do so for years to come. Not all bad then.

WARBALLS

Time Of Defiance is a perpetual strategy game played against real people, up to 1,000 of them in each game. You start off on a randomly generated island, joining 3,000 other rocks on a colossal map – a map so big that it takes about 10 hours for one of your ships to cross. Through a combination of resource building, diplomacy and strategic planning, you must ensure that your budding empire prospers in the face of your neighbouring players.

Games last 28 days, although weekend-only options are available for wimps and the terminally busy. On the

plus side this limits your chances of meeting a behemoth MMOG player who has been building strength from day one (known in ZONE circles as 'a Chris Anderson') and keeps affairs tight and furiously addictive.

It's a game that you can keep running in the background of your desktop – a battleship will take around 50 minutes to create after all – and should you ever feel the need to sleep or go to the toilet, orders can be left with your islands to keep them ticking over. If some git attacks you in the middle of the night then you're slightly buggered, but the game will send emails about your upcoming decimation,

so perhaps the answer is to never to touch your PC's 'off' button.

The real hook for *Time Of Defiance* is the player interaction. Hazy alliances can be made, information can be traded and powerful aggressors can be paid off with bribes (the online equivalent of giving your dinner money to the big boys at playtime). Intelligence, pre-made ships and warp-gate codes can also be purchased from the omnipresent Eighth

House – an NPC corporation that makes a tidy profit from supplying arms.

NEW WAVE

Some may be familiar with *ToD* already. Having been available to download for some time now, it's already garnered an enthusiastic community. Thanks to Nicely Crafted Entertainment's recent deal with publisher Oxygen Interactive, it's now heading to retailers with a barrage of new content. Updated graphics, new music and sound effects and a free three-month trial period all come with the boxed copies. Refinements to the gameplay are also promised, although this comes down to balancing and nicer-looking interfaces. How well this will go down with the paying public remains to be seen. [X]





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power of one may change the
destiny of many.
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LOOKING ROLE-PLAYING / REAL-TIME
STRATEGY HYBRIDS WE'VE SEEN"

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RuneScape 2 even has its own magic system. Play it anywhere through a web browser, without worrying about patches.

Browser arouser...

RUNESCAPE 2

WEB-BASED

Rhianna Pratchett leaves long downloads and lags for the world of Java games

IT'S EASY TO forget that there's an online gaming world that exists outside of the big-budget, big hype, shiny-boxed titles. One that isn't bogged down by ponderous downloads and annoying patching sessions. Welcome to the world of Java games, a sub-genre that's flourishing just a few browser-clicks away.

While you may know that those little Java games you dabble in to kill a bit of time while surfing can be very addictive, it's unlikely you'll have considered them as a long-term gaming option. So it would probably surprise you to know the Java-based RPG *RuneScape*, from



Cambridge-based developers Jagex, has over 660,000 regular players. That's almost as many as *EverQuest*.

The *RuneScape* world is about to go through big changes as *RuneScape 2* approaches its release (although when the transition from prequel to sequel is complete it will still simply be known as *RuneScape*), which involves, among other things, a huge 3D graphics update.

THE BIG TIME

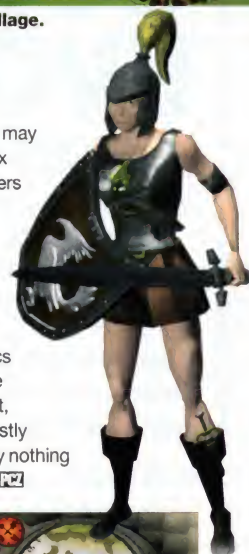
Before you start turning your nose up at these new screenshots, it's worth remembering that while *RuneScape 2* might not be *Neverwinter Nights* looks-wise, the limitations of Java are very different from what we're used to seeing on these pages. In fact, when the game goes into public beta in December it will be the most accomplished and far-reaching Java game in the world.

Like many Java games, a lot of *RuneScape 2* is free to play, and for this you'll get access to a huge world that's a cross between old-school point-and-click adventures like the *King's Quest* series and RPGs like the *Ultima* games. There are skills to be learned, quests to be completed, trading, chatting and the usual vanquishing of evil. Subscribers will also get access to even more quests and areas for a very reasonable \$5 a month.

The real appeal of the *RuneScape* world is its portability – you can play it anywhere through a web browser. You don't even have to worry about patches, because they'll automatically be there each time you load up the homepage. Developer Jagex is also hoping to make it feel like a very organic, ever-changing experience. Through its own home-grown 3D engine, they can add new content very rapidly, which is why they're aiming to introduce new quests, areas, skills and mini-games on a weekly basis.

Essentially, *RuneScape 2* is all about accessibility, both in physical terms and

in its gameplay. It may not be as complex as hardcore RPGers are used to, but Jagex certainly deserves much praise for introducing many advanced gaming mechanics into an area of the gaming world that, until now, has mostly been governed by nothing but *Tetris* clones. [E]



There are plenty of battles to be fought.



It's not an RPG if it hasn't got a dungeon...



...or a gnome village.



Jagex hopes to include weather effects at a later date.

THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER Jagex
DEVELOPER Jagex
ETA Public beta December 2003
WEBSITE www.runescape.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- A huge and immersive online fantasy world
- Play it through an Internet browser
- No big downloads
- Already has a huge global community



The race mode is a recipe for fun.



Too many Master Chfs spoil the broth. (Master 'Chief' - Ed)

HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED



MULTIPLAYER

■ £29.99 | Pub: Microsoft | Dev: Bungie/
Gearbox | ETA: Out Now |
www.microsoft.com/games/halo

REQUIRES PIII 733, 128MB RAM, 32MB 3D card and broadband
DESIRES P4 2GHz, 256MB, 128MB 3D card and broadband



Bungie's legendary shooter is finally online, but has it missed the boat?
Jamie Sefton joins the Holy War...

IT'S WELL past midnight. I've just staggered out of the PC ZONE offices on to the cold, rain-spattered London streets after a post-work *Halo* online multiplayer session, a big stupid grin plastered across my face.

INPERSPECTIVE

PLANETSIDE

Reviewed Issue 131, Score 82%

An immense, futuristic online multiplayer experience with finely balanced units and weapons on a scale much larger than *Halo*.

For team-players only.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003

Reviewed Issue 122, Score 90%

Currently the futuristic team shooter of choice. Not as involving as *PlanetSide*, but there is a sequel on the way very soon.

Bleary-eyed and haunted by images of plasma weapon blasts, flame-thrower assaults and four-wheeled vehicles slamming ragdoll bodies against walls, I reckon tonight has been one of the most enjoyable evening's gaming I've had for a long time.

Developer Gearbox has taken over a year to take Bungie's groundbreaking Xbox version and mould it into an online PC title, but it's been worth the wait. President Randy Pitchford and his Texas team have used their extensive knowledge to ensure that *Halo* lines up comfortably alongside other popular online multiplayer heavyweights.

Halo on PC retains all the multiplayer options from the Xbox – apart from the co-operative



"Eat this, mutha. Maybe with a nice rocket salad?"

Story mode – and adds six hot new maps (for a total of 19), one new vehicle (the three-man missile-firing Rocket Warthog buggy) and, best of all, two brand new weapons – the flame-thrower and the fuel-rod gun.

LESS IS NEVER MORE

The lack of a co-op mode has been the cause of much teeth-gnashing on t'Net and it's a big mistake on Gearbox/Bungie's part to have excluded the most enjoyable feature of the console version. An update is supposedly being worked on to add this absolutely vital element back to the game, but it really should have been there from the start.

Each new level offers different experiences, encouraging you to

use certain weapons and vehicles for tactical superiority. For example, Gephyrophobia takes place on a bridge over a huge chasm and has ledges on either side for sniping from distance, but with the Banshee flying attack vehicles dominating from above. Or there's Timberland, an open level with hills, trees and a river that's ideal for manic tank battles. Or there's Ice Fields, a snow-covered level that's awesome for skidding around in Warthogs, and is as playable in Race mode as it is in a Slayer deathmatch.





Double Kill! (7)

You killed bomber (6)
geezer was killed by crim
big caboos was killed by Micky
You killed Soul Travel (7)

The Master Chef whips up a soufflé storm. (It's Chief. CHIEF! - Ed)

gameplay that requires more tactics and skill. It's not as team-dependent as *Battlefield 1942* or *PlanetSide*, but you can't deny it's huge fun. Solo Slayer games (deathmatches) are insanely enjoyable – especially in small levels where your default

firing a weapon in the passenger seat, as you take the wheel and bounce merrily over the terrain towards fortified enemy positions. In one particularly intense Team Slayer game, I had a race on with a rival player for a Banshee that another player had

really have the tactical finesse of *Battlefield 1942* or the sophistication of *PlanetSide*, but for sheer no-nonsense fun and laugh-out-loud hilarity, nothing else can (ahem) kiss its ring (had to get it in, folks).

One other major criticism is that you do need a very high-spec PC and a broadband connection to enjoy games without annoying slowdown and lag, but patch updates should mean the network code – completely written from scratch for the PC version – should improve with every new version. Plus, Gearbox has already pledged its support for the online community with free tutorials and mod kits to follow very soon, ensuring that *Halo* really will shine brightly online. **PCZ**

“Having Banshee dogfights high above Blood Gulch is an experience to be savoured”

weapon is the rocket launcher – but Team Slayer and Capture The Flag is where the real fun's at. Although Gearbox and Bungie have set the maximum player limit at 16, eight versus eight will provide enough non-stop hectic action for most gamers.

There's a real thrill in jumping in a Warthog buggy with two other team-mates, one mounting the gun on the back and one

just crashed into the ground. Just beating them to the ship, I then managed to take off, turn the craft around and plough it at full speed into his helpless body, killing him instantly – beyond magnificent.

RING-A-DING-DING

Comparing *Halo* with other current online favourites is tricky because it doesn't



The Master Chef holds a giant cook-off. (You're fired - Ed)

Although Gearbox provides gamers with a multitude of game types, the big pull is the customisable Create-Your-Own mode. You can set one life per game, include a set of the meatiest weapons for *UT*-style carnage or even add vehicles to Xbox maps – having Banshee dogfights high above the infamous Blood Gulch level for the first time is an experience to be savoured.

Halo's key is the exquisite balancing on display, with each vehicle and weapon having

advantages and disadvantages. You can pound numerous poor souls into submission using the Scorpion tank, but the slow-moving behemoth is extremely vulnerable to plasma mortars and rocket launchers. Flame-throwers are useful in tightly-packed corridors, but out in the open, the poor range makes you an easy target for snipers.

As *Halo* multiplayer doesn't involve the high-speed twitch-gaming prevalent in games like *Quake III*, this admirable fine-tuning has paid off with

TWO'S COMPANY



The Master Chef tries a barbecue.

HALO'S NEW MULTIPLAYER WEAPONS ARE A BLAST

The most exciting addition to the PC version of *Halo: Combat Evolved* has to be the two brand new weapons – the flame-thrower and the fuel-rod gun. Apparently Bungie had wanted to include the flame-thrower in the original Xbox game, but didn't have the time to implement it. Gearbox took the designs, modified them and made sure that, in president Randy Pitchford's words, “it totally kicks ass”, char-grilling any nearby foes within seconds. The new plasma-chucking fuel-rod gun, however, was suggested by Gearbox, who felt the addition of a mortar-style weapon would provide more options for team tactics in multiplayer games. The fuel-rod gun is immensely useful for laying down suppressing fire before mounting a full-scale team attack, or taking pot shots at well dug-in enemies.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ It's finally online (where it belongs)
- ✓ Enormous variety of level design
- ✓ Vehicle combat is magnificent
- ✓ Damned funny
- ✗ No co-op storyline modes – what were you thinking Gearbox?
- ✗ Noticeable slowdown and lag problems without broadband

86

The new *Counter-Strike*, but needs co-op



No crowds... They're probably over at *Tiger Woods 2004*.

FXGOLF

Price: \$7.95 plus extra golf balls thereafter | Developer: Freenix Inc | Publisher: K2 Network | ETA: Out Now | www.fxgolf.com

REQUIRES PIII 400MHz, 128MB RAM, 400MB free HD space, 8MB graphics card, Internet connection
DESIRES PIII, 256MB RAM, 400MB free HD space, 32MB video card, 600K+ broadband connection

No one likes a sociable round of golf more than *Keith Pullin*.
Not a whole lot for him here then...

THE CREATORS

FXGolf will have you believe that thousands of people are currently whacking away merrily on their site all around the world. So after reading through the sensationalised bumph accompanying the sign-up process, it comes as a bit of a shock to find a mere six people waiting in the lobby. Moreover five of those were Korean and the other person never said a word – ever. The golfing equivalent of *EverQuest* this is not.

PGA RULES

A couple of years ago, *PGA Championship Golf 2000* had a vibrant online community with

hundreds of golfers vying for supremacy. There were massive global tournaments to participate in and the course architect meant the community talked not just about who was beating whom, but about all the new courses and how to play them.

The only problem with *PGA 2000*'s online community was that the loser(s) of matches were the ones responsible for logging the results on an exterior website. This, of course, led to matches not being reported and

much dissension in the ranks. Still, good or bad, there were always plenty of issues to talk about. These days you can find similar levels of activity with both the *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2003* (soon to be *TW2004*) and *Links 2003* online play.

FXGolf offers none of this. Admittedly it's early days, but considering the quality of the game, it would be surprising if many more people signed up. Community issues aside, this is frankly one of the worst golf

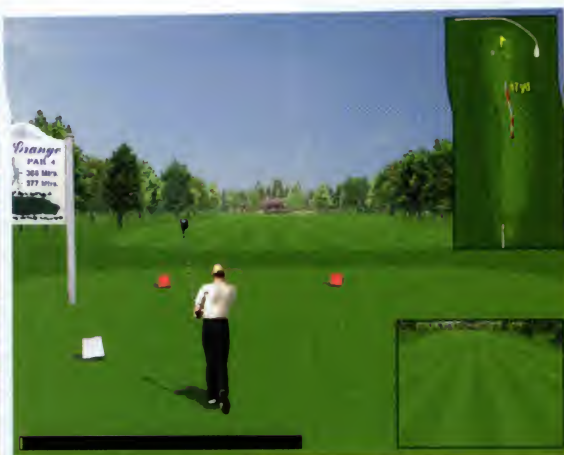
"This is frankly one of the worst golf games to ever appear on the PC"



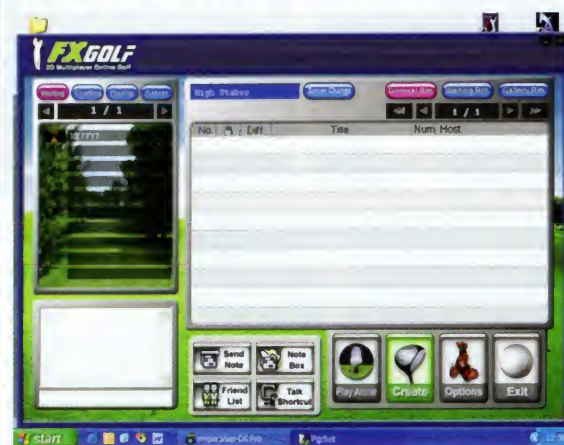
Stay and build sandcastles – it's more fun.



The green break indicator is little help.



Giving online gaming a bad name since 2003!



Masses of people are waiting to play, as you can see.

games to ever appear on the PC. Aesthetically it's about as pleasant to look at as a rotting corpse. What's more, the ball physics are reminiscent of *World Class Leader Board* on the Spectrum 48K and the swing interface is the old tri-click method, which is oh so passé.

Needless to say, the few sound effects present in the game are laughable. All in all, it's a bit of a shambles.

GOLFING WIDOW

It's difficult to dredge up anything positive about FXGolf really, but at a push you have to admire the golf ball currency system. Put simply, you buy golf balls on your credit card (on top of the initial subscription fee, mind) and then use them as betting chips with other players.

It's a nice idea and fairly innovative, it's just a shame the game itself is so crap.

With *TW* and *Links* both offering ample online support and a much better gameplay experience generally, there is absolutely no reason whatsoever to go anywhere near FXGolf. It may be a quick download on a broadband connection (around 60MB) and relatively cheap to boot, but these are minor redeeming features of what is regrettably a triple-bogey golfing experience. **EW**



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Good betting system
- ✗ Awful graphics and sound
- ✗ Poor interface
- ✗ Completely unrealistic physics
- ✗ Nobody to play with (boo hoo)

31

A lonely and depressed swinger



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EVE OF DESTRUCTION V0.21



SIZE 269MB (+6MB v0.21 patch) **REQUIRES** Full version of *Battlefield 1942*

www.planetbattlefield.com/eod

TOTAL CONVERSION

Tony Lamb plunges into the jungle and suffers from dry heat

BATTLEFIELD 1942 mods are maturing thick and fast, and the standard is getting ever better. *Eve Of Destruction*'s theatre is the Indochina/Vietnam war and if you've ever seen *Apocalypse Now* you're in for a treat, as this is where the Air Cavalry come into their element. You can even have Wagner's *The Ride Of The Valkyries* blasting out to complete the effect. There are aircraft and fast patrol boats in the mix as well, but the emphasis is on helicopters, so you'd better have your chopper controls up to speed (check out the online Huey manual for starters).

EOD offers a halfway-house between vanilla *BF1942* and the ultra-modernity of *Desert Combat*. The time period for this mod spans 1946 to 1973, although it generally sticks with '60s weaponry on both sides. There are only a few maps so far, but the names

are synonymous with the Vietnam conflict and they all impress in terms of gameplay, design and atmosphere.

Vehicle models and weapon and soldier skins are well up to scratch too, all accurately detailed and adding to the neat feel of the mod.

The "Target Practice" fix (also available from the same URL) adds bots to what had previously been a multiplayer-only outing, as well as offering the original *BF1942* maps with all the *EOD* goodies, and is a welcome improvement, although online servers can be limited. Finally, just to add icing to the cake, version 0.3 is already in the pipeline. Can't wait.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

79

**Good, but lacking the
'Essential' polish**



The porn wars hot up. Sadly, Miss July fails to put in an appearance.

CONQUEST MARINES V1.1



SIZE 32.4MB **REQUIRES** Full version of *UT2003* patched to v2225, with Epic Bonus Pack One

www.conquestmarines.com

TOTAL CONVERSION

Tony Lamb loads his guns in this UT mod



I said I was going to wear the grey outfit, bitch.



The battle for cliché hill.

YOU'RE AT the sharp edge of a galactic war between two cultural factions, each sending its troops into a battle for ultimate supremacy. It's marine against marine... and it's bloody. Sound familiar? It should do, it's straight out of the drawer marked "clichéd mod ideas". But don't let that put you off because *Conquest Marines*

does it better than most. Take a look at the models – the body armour's chunkier than Kit Kat's finest, the weapons are bigger than anything Schwarzenegger ever packed, and the last time I saw a vehicle as imposing as one of these it was delivering *ZONE's* fan mail. *Conquest Marines* offers a ton of good ideas and certainly has more than enough

ambition floating around to keep the interest levels up.

Game mechanics are focused on providing a fun, action-packed knockabout, with the armoured hover tanks and *Star Wars*-style jet bikes adding a dose of mobility not found in most other *UT* mods (although adding a crew position or two would have made them more

useful). The tanks are let down by having a particularly wimpy machinegun as their second weapon, and the maps don't offer enough of the open terrain that such beasts need to really come into their own, but they're a welcome addition nonetheless. The maps, while large, are a little convoluted and need opening out to benefit the vehicles and

to make tactical team movement more effective. Ultimately this is a small but neat mod that simply needs a spot of fine tuning to really shine.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

70

**Clichéd fare, but there's
potential for more**



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PCZONE READERS' CHALLENGE

WIN
BIG
PRIZES!!

Fight, fight, fight, fight! Not that we condone violence of course, just the virtual kind...

EXCITEMENT IS mounting! As we go to press we're just a week or two away from the end of round one in this, the inaugural *PC ZONE* Readers' Challenge. Ups, downs and one or two technical hitches, but we've made it this far and judgement day will soon be upon us.

As it stands, the *Enemy Territory* ladder has become a two-horse race between the [CoC] and GaY Clan teams. The *Unreal Tournament 2003* ladder is more open, with Jimmy, Quasar, Agent and [2mw^Jedi] providing the final run in, although there's still time to wrestle the title away from them. Finally, the *Day Of Defeat* ladder is somewhat less intense, with only a few teams really making an effort (come on chaps), the favourite looking like the Bad Applez clan.

As was apparent, this first round wasn't without its hitches, but after some tinkering with the server

code, organiser Jolt has put into place some more streamlined systems and a step-by-step list of instructions on how to both sign up and make challenges once you're up and running.

Remember, it's up to you to issue challenges in your particular ladder otherwise you won't be going anywhere other than downwards (lazy or unresponsive players will be penalised by a loss of places).

Since round two will almost be with us, you might want to know which games you should be preparing for. Our two team-based games will be *Halo* and *Counter-Strike*, while *Quake III* will be the shooter of choice for all you lone gunmen. Next month we'll bring you a complete list of the rules, maps and conditions for these titles, but make sure you check out www.pczone.jolt.co.uk before then to get a head start.

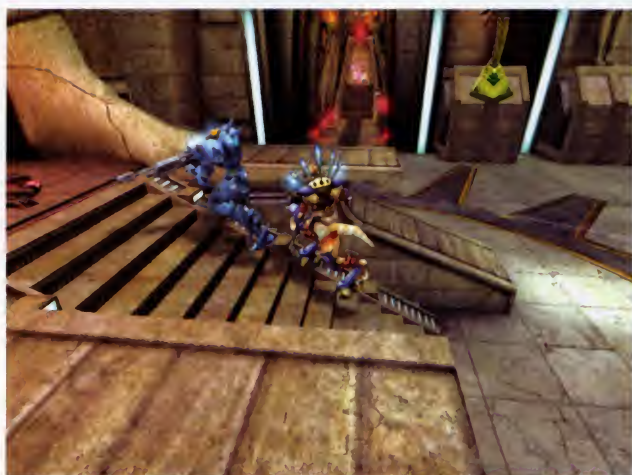
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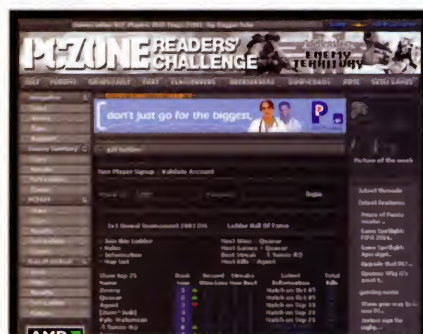


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Behind you! The online pantomime that is *Unreal Tournament 2003*.



Round one draws to a close.



Fight for glory!

Nice model, shame about the paint job.

LAN ROVER

STEVE 'SCALPER' RANDALL GOES LAN SCANNING

With December being the party month, most organisers are having their LANs in November. If you regularly get an arse whipping at any particular game, now may be the last chance of the year to gain some pointers on how to improve. I'm sure the organisers of any of the following events will help you wherever they can.

■ **WolfLan** (www.wolfan.com) is in the Lawton Hotel, Blackpool. They are growing well and now offer 60 places for this, their fifth event. Cost is £20 and runs from 8pm on November 28 till 8pm on Sunday November 30.

■ The **Blasthards** (www.blasthards.co.uk) have reached their 10th event, running from December 5-7 at Thirsk Conservative Club, North Yorkshire. Costing just £14 for the whole event, they may still be able to squeeze you in.

■ **FlintFrag** (www.flintfrag.co.uk) is a regular one-day event from November 23, from 10am till 10pm, costing just £10 at the Holiday Inn on the A55 North Wales.

■ If you've got £15 and are free on November 14-16 from 7pm, then check out www.westlan.co.uk. Their event is near Exeter, Lymptone Village Hall, hence the name – Lymplan 12. They have space for 35 players.

■ Sixty players will be enjoying *Frag 7* on November 22-23 and with places filling fast you may want to get your £30 in quick. It's in Philips Park Hall, Liverpool, and will be held next door to a party of 250 dental nurses. Check out the website at www.fragurself.co.uk for more info.

■ If you're still able to get in, **Moongames** (www.moongames.co.uk) is hosting a three-day event in Kettering, Northamptonshire from November 28-30, costing £25 on the door and with around 70 spaces.

■ If you're organising an event, let me know with two month's notice at scalper@ggfan.co.uk. Scalper out.

FIGHT CLUB

FIRST RULE OF FIGHT CLUB: PC ZONE OWNZ JØØ

"THIS IS the finest moment of my online gaming career!" Words torn from the very mouth of PC ZONE's own Anthony Holden as our October *Battlefield 1942* Fight Club took place. Oddly enough, this "finest moment" involved little more than being chased by yours truly in a small fighter plane as he, disc editor Suzy Wallace and staff writer Will Porter manned the controls of a B-17 bomber.

Of course you glorious readers provided plenty of fun on the night, with fast-paced battles taking place almost everywhere you looked. Fight Club regular [HeMan]Mongoose led the charge for the majority of the time, with his compadre [HeMan]Markus, Ravenger and <-/FWR-> Faction also notching up impressive scores.

■ With the large server capacity of our *BF1942* game, we were also lucky enough to be joined by Phil Wand himself for the majority of the night, whose own silky skills helped restore some pride to the otherwise comedic stylings of the rest of the ZONE crew. At this rate we'll have to bring back *Counter-Strike* just to start getting some scores on the doors (although to be fair, we were never much good at that either).

■ Unfortunate late breaking news. As you may have noticed while reading the small print on the

contents page (you do read every word of this mag, right?), we moved offices this month. Aside from all the usual hubbub (some say fracas), that comes with a big move (lost office equipment, lost staff members, lost inhibitions), we also ran into a temporary hitch with our gaming machines.

As a result we had to cancel the November *Day Of Defeat* Fight Club while we relocated our state-of-the-art (not) gaming arena to its new home. Normal service should be resumed with the scheduled December event (see below).

COME & HAVE A GO!
www.zonegames.co.uk
for all the info

UPCOMING FIGHT CLUBS

THURSDAY DECEMBER 4

6.30pm – 9.00pm

Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory

THURSDAY JANUARY 8

6.30pm – 9.00pm

Battlefield 1942

THURSDAY FEBRUARY 5

6.30pm – 9.00pm

Halo



Anthony's "finest online gaming moment".



Suzy wastes no time picking up the readers.



Will shows off his driving skills.



Fight Club virgin Wandy struts his stuff.



Fight Club regular Mongoose gets busy.



Ant finds a novel vantage point.

GUILDHALL

▲ FEELING LOST AND ALONE?

Looking for that special group of someones to share your love of group gaming? Wanna, to be blunt, be in my gang? Check out some of the guilds and clans currently recruiting members and soon you too could find happiness, togetherness and a sense of belonging.

CLAN <VC> Victoria Cross

CONTACT Dequalinium

WEBSITE www.clanvc.com

MAIN GAMES *Day Of Defeat*

DETAILS We are an old *DOD* clan from the very early days of the mod, with many experienced members. We're always looking for extra (good) team players. We play many games including ladders, leagues, cups and for fun. We live on IRC (quakenet server, #dod_vc channel) and frag on 195.20.108.66:27020.

CLAN Praemunio Squadron

CONTACT nifty@clan-mwd.co.uk

WEBSITE www.praemunio.co.uk

MAIN GAME *PlanetSide*

DETAILS We are a *PlanetSide* outfit looking for British members to dominate the skies of Auraxis like the RAF dominated them in WWII. Experience isn't really an issue just a good sense of kinsmanship toward fellow gamers.

CLAN UK Legends Racing Series (UKLRS)

CONTACT via the website

WEBSITE www.simnutz.co.uk/~uklrs

MAIN GAMES *Grand Prix Legends*, *Nascar Racing 2003* and *Live For Speed*

DETAILS Want to race in a friendly, helpful yet competitive league? Come and see us then! A new NASCAR season will be starting soon. We use a dedicated server that can hold 42 cars. We have test races for new drivers, so don't worry if you haven't raced online before. Check the website for more info.

CLAN T.K.O.

CONTACT Kerry

WEBSITE www.tkoder.tk

MAIN GAMES *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*

DETAILS T.K.O. is a *MOH:AA* clan soon to include *Breakthrough* and *Call Of Duty*. We are looking for members to join who are interested in competing in ladders for all these games. We are currently 12th on the OGL TDM Realism ladder and are preparing to make a push for the top spot.

CLAN #oguk

CONTACT Coatsey & Darkslide

WEBSITE www.oguk.com

MAIN GAMES *PlanetSide*, *Counter-Strike*, *BF1942* and *Ragnarok*

DETAILS We are a general Online Gaming Community for all ages. We run a *PlanetSide* squad and soon a *C-S* and *BF1942* one. We hope to have your support at oguk and we can cater for all of your gaming needs. So please join us!

CLAN RS Red Squadrons

CONTACT highcommand@redsquadrons.org

WEBSITE www.redsquadrons.org

MAIN GAMES *Ghost Recon*, *BF1942*, *MOH*, *Bridge Commander*, *ST Armada 1 & 2*, *SFC 1, 2 & 3*, *OP* & others

DETAILS Red Squadrons was formed in 1998 as a *Star Trek* clan. We have now ventured into other games, with a new section of the clan called the Marine Divisions. We have 10 gaming divisions with around 135 members from all over the world. We look forward to seeing you.

To feature in Guildhall, simply send your details along with no more than 50 words describing your group to online.zone@pczone.co.uk (subject line: GUILDHALL) or to Guildhall, PC Zone, 9 Dallington St, London EC1V 0BQ.



SERVE UP A WINNER

1 This may seem like plain old common sense, but picking a decent server is central to having an enjoyable *Enemy Territory* session. There are plenty to choose from (including *PC ZONE*'s dedicated one) and UK-based gamers should be able to get some cracking low pings from those in Britain and Western Europe. Although bear in mind that, naturally enough, some of those situated in the latter tend to be dominated by humourless gun-nuts.

Also consider a server's selected options (friendly fire turned on or off, for instance) and its current game mode – Stopwatch, Campaign or Single Objective.



PLAY NICE

2 Online gamers can be an unforgiving bunch, and to avoid being, at best, mercilessly sworn at in 'haXX0r' speak and, at worst, kicked off the server, you'll want to bear in mind a few of the *Enemy Territory* community's unwritten rules. Understandably, capping your team-mates is generally frowned upon, and if you file a complaint after walking into a mine laid by a friendly Engineer you'll likely attract a fair bit of ire. Spawn-camping (sitting right outside the enemy spawn point with heavy weaponry and firing in) is also widely regarded as an *ET* faux pas. You have been warned.

THERE'S NO 'I' IN 'TEAM'

3 Teamwork, as anyone who remembers Al Capone's dinner party from *The Untouchables* will know, is regarded as being very important, and with *ET* this is especially true if you're playing as the Allied team. The level designs mean that the onus is usually on the Allies to do something and the Axis to stop them (Railgun is the exception to the rule), and working together with a good balance of classes is essential. If you join a server and find your team has no Medic but four Covert Ops, it's probably best for the team if you opt for the doctor's scalpel.



WHAT'S UP, DOC?

4 A good class for the *ET* newcomer to choose is the Medic. Healing people might sound like a dull supporting role, but believe us, it isn't, and a hard-working Medic is rewarded very quickly with XP and upgrades. A Medic's own health will top itself up slowly over time, and if they're part of a good team their lack of ammo shouldn't be a problem. Distribute health freely and any Field Op worth his salt will return the favour with a couple of ammunition packs. It also feels oddly gratifying when a team-mate audibly thanks you for reviving them.

MEMORISE THE MAPS

5 The objective-based levels can seem confusing at first, and newbies can often be found wandering pointlessly around deserted parts of the larger maps. Once you learn the layout of each level – the locations of choke points, gun emplacements, command posts and vital objectives – things become a lot easier. Entering an empty server or hosting a game yourself can be a great way of getting to grips with the command map and level design. You won't have to worry about dodging bullets and, with only six official maps available at the moment, it won't take long to whizz around them all.



Getting started in... WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY

Online shooters can be scary places for rookie warriors.

Luckily *Sam Kieldsen* is packing enough heat to teach us all a thing or two



PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

6 Some of the more exotic armaments in *ET* take a bit of getting used to, so it definitely pays to practise hard on a quiet server with the likes of the Panzerfaust, mortar and flamethrower. All have their uses, but all too often we see the uninitiated receiving abuse or even being chuckled off servers for poor weapons handling. If someone sees you fire a mortar straight up in the air and you are subsequently killed when it lands on your head, you might raise a laugh, but take some of your teammates with you and you're liable to get kicked.



CAN WE FIX IT?

7 The Engineer is undoubtedly the single most important class in *Enemy Territory*. Without one, you can't destroy the end objectives in Oasis, Battery and Fuel Dump, disarm dynamite, build/blow up fortifications or repair vehicles on any of the levels, so having at least a couple on each side is imperative. If you choose to be one, and you're on the Allied team, it pays to be proactive and aggressive: getting to the front line, building, destroying and repairing. Axis Engineers will generally be able to concentrate on a more defensive role, laying mines and constructing barricades and command posts.



ARE YOU XP-ERIENCED?

9 *Enemy Territory*'s unique experience point system means that if you play well, and to your class strengths, you'll quickly move up the ranks, gaining some bumper abilities and upgrades along the way. We particularly like the Level 4 Medic ability to self-administer an adrenaline shot, as well as the John Woo-style dual pistol mode that's available when you reach top level in Light Weapons. One word of warning: so-called 'XP whores' – players who are more intent on gaining experience than helping their team win the game (usually Engineers building/repairing stuff needlessly) – don't get much respect on most servers. The selfish gits.

SPIES LIKE US

8 Take a gander at the average *Wolfenstein* message board and you'll probably see several angry topics on how the Covert Op class's popularity bears little relationship to its usefulness (or lack thereof). While it's true that Snipers are only really effective on Fuel Dump and Seawall Battery, the Covert Ops' other skills do come in useful. Spotting enemy landmines is a great boon for teammates, and the satchel charge can destroy certain constructions much more quickly than an Engineer's dynamite. Don't forget their crafty ability to take on a disguise and sneak friendly units through an enemy team door.

A-BIND WITH ME

10 If you want to get below the skin of *ET* to improve your 1337 skillz, you can try your hand at some basic scripting. Find the *ET* install folder in Windows, go to 'etmain', then 'profiles', then the folder named after your in-game profile. Open the 'etconfig.cfg' file with Notepad, and you're ready. Don't worry: this isn't cheating, but simply customising the key configuration to help your performance. For example, adding the line "bind b 'weaponbank5'" will mean that when playing as a Medic, pressing the B key will instantly equip the syringe. Check online forums for more complex examples.



COMMUNITY CHEST



QUAKE III

Tony Lamb revels in the hardcore carnage that quakes your foundations

It might be wagging its gore-encrusted Zimmer frame, but until *Doom 3* arrives and worldwide legions of salivating gamers get to revel in its horrors, *Quake III* remains id Software's sci-fi flagship.

Many deathmatch fans still faithfully believe that this is the most hardcore of all fragging experiences because despite having been overtaken by better-looking, slicker and more feature-packed games, *Quake III*'s still the most visceral shooter around, with an in-er-face style that dedicated adrenaline junkies adore. Id started the mod ball rolling by making game code available to fans, and the rest – gut-wrenching cliché though it is – is history.



NAVY SEALS: COVERT OPERATIONS 1.9 (TOTAL CONVERSION)

www.ns-co.net

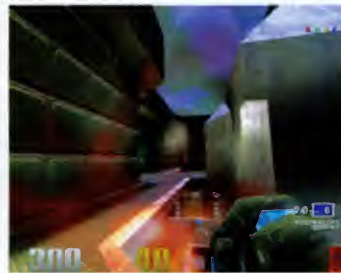
Reflecting the skills of the US SEAL teams, NSCO is a testament to the long-lasting popularity of *Quake III*. This full-featured TC contains new models, maps, sounds, weapons, interface and many more features that make it stand out over the majority of mods – for any game.



THREEWAVE CTF 1.6 (TOTAL CONVERSION)

www.threewave.com

This is a Capture The Flag fans' wet dream. Now at version 1.6, this is a sure-fire bet for CTF addicts who want the best gameplay, maps, skins and all-round fragging package that *Quake III* can offer. The Threewave guys have a history that stretches all the way back to *Quake I*, and it shows.



EXTREME ARENA 1.20 (MOD)

www.planetquake.com/xa

Extreme Arena takes the already frenetic pace of *Quake III* and pumps it with steroids. The biggest change is the provision of alternative fire modes for all the weapons, but it also features new games modes, strength, resist and 'vampire' runes (leech strength from enemies), plus much more. Great fun.



PLANETQUAKE (FANSITE)

www.planetquake.com

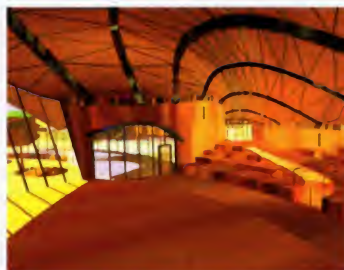
Yet again, the ubiquitous 'Planet' site is probably the best 'first stop'. With links to files for the whole *Quake* series, up-to-date news, an unrivalled collection of hosted sites, reviews of just about everything *Quake*-related, forums, mods, maps, skins and more, this is a must-have bookmark.



QUAKE MOVIE LIBRARY (MOVIES)

machinima.com/qml

Hollywood on a shoestring. Machinima – using 3D game engines as animation tools – is increasingly popular and while it won't rival Pixar for sheer 'wow' factor, some very impressive results can be achieved. Originally called the Quake Movie Library, Machinima.com is the place to start for budding Spielbergs.



GTKRADIANT (MAP EDITOR)

www.qeradiant.com

Budding *Quake III* map designers are springing up everywhere, although it's not a pastime for the faint-hearted. Mappers will need Radiant, the most popular map design tool to bring their ideas to life and it can handle anything your fevered mind throws at it. Be sure to RTFM first though.



BERNEYBOY (FANSITE)

www.planetquake.com/berneyboy

BerneyBoy has made every mapper's life easier by releasing a texture-pack for use with GtkRadiant (left), and with some 2,000 photo-realistic textures available there should be enough to keep anyone busy. You'll also find some of BerneyBoy's great maps here too, as well as tutorials, links and loads of inspiration.



PADMAN (MAP SOURCE)

padworld.myexp.de/padmaps/index.html

Regular gothic *Quake* maps are easy to find, but for something different there's PADMAN, a map maker with an eye for design that's recognisable, imaginative, eccentric and wildly enjoyable. Detail levels are outstanding and you won't find brighter colours anywhere. Big maps, but worth it.

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1 DEUS EX

Arguably the best PC game ever, scoring a massive 94% in PCZONE, Deus Ex is an RPG of complex beauty. The twisting sci-fi plot and unparalleled player freedom are two of the reasons why this is a true classic.



2 COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2.0

Still PCZONE's benchmark rally title, with a massive 85% rating, simply because there's no other game that comes close to replicating the experience. With amazing visuals and cars that handle superbly, this is a must for car-nuts.



3 GROUND CONTROL

Still considered an essential purchase (87%, PCZONE March 2003), Ground Control is a stunning real-time strategy game that gets everything right. Go in all-guns blazing, right from the start.



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STEVE HILL'S NEVERQUEST

Online adventuring rookie Steve Hill gets his sandals on in *A Tale In The Desert*

"HOW DO you fancy going to Egypt?" As a change from the traditional press trip locations – California, Guildford – it was a tempting offer. However, no passport was required. Egypt was my destination, but my arse wouldn't actually leave my chair. Realistically, the ability to arrive without travelling is only properly facilitated by psychedelic drugs, or nowadays, 'that Internet'.

It's the latter route that concerns us here, as the terrifying world of online gaming takes an historical twist. Following various escapades in imaginary future worlds, we're taking a step back in time, and I'm going to, quite literally, walk like an Egyptian. If you've read Rhianna's review of *A Tale In The Desert* (issue 133), you'll know that she liked it so much she bought a subscription. And it's her involvement that has indirectly led me to this place.

While wandering the windswept plains of ancient Egypt, our Rhianna got talking to a strapping young man called Fekker and, as the game dictates, became his mentor. While planting seeds and picking berries, they somehow managed to establish the

fact that they had a mutual acquaintance, namely my good self. Fekker has, in turn, since agreed to be my mentor on the understanding that we retain his anonymity. As head of the marketing department of a \$300 million company, it's probably best kept quiet that he spends most of his working day raising farmyard animals in an imaginary land. As he says, "I'm not sure the shareholders would be as enthusiastic about Egypt as me!" Following delicate logistical negotiations, arrangements are made, or in Fekker's own words, "I'll send the missus out with white wine, money and condoms and I'll set a night aside!"

FRUIT OF THE LOOM

That night has come, and no sooner have my feet touched the sand than someone called Psylo offers to be my mentor. I politely decline, explaining that I am already spoken for.

Getting my bearings, I seem to be – unsurprisingly – in a desert. Fekker appears in a chat box, and through some technical jiggery-pokery, teleports me to his camp. By way of greeting, I give him some grass (not for the first time) and he in turn hands me some dung (not for the

first time). He has clearly been busy, and has built an impressive homestead, replete with all manner of elaborate machinery and even some rabbits and sheep.

Having joined Fekker's guild, he proceeds to patiently show me the ropes, like a father teaching a son to shave. Over the next few hours (OK, days), I learn to live off the fat of the land, harvesting flax, weaving it into twine and then into rope. You can't make bricks without straw, nor it seems mud and sand, all of which can be reaped from the surrounding environs.

ART SCHOOL

When he feels that I am ready, Fekker finds me a location to set up my own camp. Wood and water are plentiful, and while it's walking distance from his place, it's not close enough for me to lower the tone and bring down property prices.

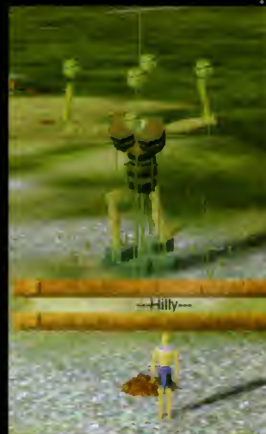
He even sends me to college to get some qualifications. I enrol at the local art school, despite once being told by my (real) art teacher that I had the coordination of an elk. According to the rules, "to qualify as an artist, you must create a good sculpture. Then you must exhibit it and gain the approval of 20 viewers".

Following several days of picking grass, I set about this task with renewed vigour and a selection of accoutrements generously donated by my mentor. It seems that my art teacher may have been right, as what I manage to create is quite literally shit on a stick, the sculpture consisting largely of a cake of dung balanced on a pole. Perhaps mistaking it as an abstract comment on modern life, it amazingly picks up a couple of positive votes.

Ohio's SirStrongarm suggests that "it needs some more substance", before declaring it "interesting if not so inspired". Hanging round my camp like a bad smell, he says, apropos of nothing, "I was out hunting mushrooms." Living the 'misunderstood artist' role to the full, I silently go about my business until he leaves.

WORLD OF SHAME

Fekker's guild is briefly joined by the hapless Keena and McSnoogins (from Canada and Scotland respectively) and he cunningly gets them to run errands for him under the guise of tuition. Ultimately though, for a supposedly massively multiplayer game, human contact is thin on the ground, and it's part work-'em-up, part solitude simulator. One



"Turner Prize, here I come!"

lonely night, I casually check on Fekker's sheep and find them to be "healthy and frisky". Maybe it's the word "frisky", maybe it's the loneliness, but before I know what I'm doing, I've broken through the fence only to find myself sunk up to the nuts in prime mutton. Fekker, I am truly sorry. (You're not the only one – Ed) [E2]

"I enrol at the local art school, where I create a sculpture consisting of a cake of dung balanced on a pole"



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■ KEEPING OUT Phil Wand

▲ Looking at traffic on a LAN isn't the most exciting way to spend an afternoon, but I found myself transfixed after a network hardware upgrade. My firewall provides easy access to logs, and I couldn't resist clicking on the 'refresh now' button to count all the break-in attempts. There were three or four a minute, most of them from PCs infected with Blaster Worm variants, all looking for a sneaky route in on port 135.

A firewall can be aggravating to configure and annoying when it blocks stuff you actually want, but that's its job. I recently caught up with Tom Parker, head of research at Pentest, who had just returned from the BlackHat conference in Washington where he'd delivered a speech on digital self-defence. "Security isn't good security unless it hinders or even inconveniences you," he said. "If it has an impact on authorised users, you can be sure it's going to get in the way of hackers. People forget that outbound data is just as dangerous as inbound. Vulnerabilities in email programs and browsers allow your PC to become a host for backdoors, which sit unnoticed as they chatter with remote machines from inside your network. Together with anti-virus software, a hardware firewall gives you the best chance of spotting and dealing with them."

▼ Last month I helped remove a Trojan from a friend's computer. Basically an FTP server, he only spotted it when strange files starting turning up on his hard drive. More recently, a local LAN party turned into a party for Worms, as Welch, the anti-Blaster variant, saturated the network from an infected PC in its attempts to latch on elsewhere. A packet sniffer spotted the surge in traffic, and the machine was unplugged, cleansed and patched. While you may keep your machine patched and up to date, most people don't. You've been warned.

FORCE LANDING

NVIDIA fights back with ForceWare, a software suite for hardware freaks



NVIDIA'S RELEASE 50 graphics driver will have been just another upgrade to many GeForce users, but to anyone with an eye on frame rates it offers a steroid-enhanced power boost. Scores in key DirectX 9 benchmarks are noticeably better than those achieved with the release 40 driver, which help make the FX look like a serious contender again (see our video benchmark special, page 136) after the serious doubts raised last month. Coupled with more sensible pricing – Gainward's 5900 Ultra can now be had for under £330, landing it squarely in 9800 Pro territory – and ATI cards are no longer a knee-jerk choice for gamers.

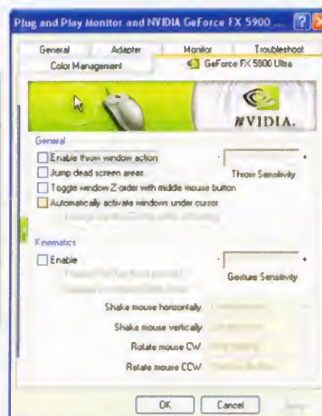
It gets better. From now on, GeForce owners will be able to download something called ForceWare from the NVIDIA website. As well as the WHQL-certified hardware drivers, the first ForceWare release includes a slew of features that fuse ideas from half a dozen different utilities. Where previously you would have had to buy or download media players, recording and encoding software, TV viewers, hardware monitoring tools and the like, NVIDIA's new unified software environment includes them all in one download. ForceWare will include:

DETONATOR

Unified architecture means the driver will work with any NVIDIA graphical processing unit, or GPU, from the latest NV38 card back to the TNT2, more than 60 products spanning four years of production.

NVIEW

NVIDIA's multi-screen and integrated desktop management software may seem like a gimmick, but the tumbling cost of monitors and the space savings brought by flat-panel technology mean an



Manage your monitors and desktop with nView.

increasing number of people are doubling up on their displays. The latest version of nView includes mouse gestures, enabling you to switch how you work with your desktop with a simple flick of the wrist.

MULTIMEDIA SOFTWARE

The ForceWare Multimedia Application is something of a feature wad – you can pause live TV, play DVDs, burn DVDs and CDs, and even stream content to other users. Radeon owners will proclaim they've had this functionality for years – the latest ATI Multimedia Center pre-empted ForceWare in many areas – but where the Radeon route demands

you buy one of the costly All-In-Wonder cards, NVIDIA offers it across their range.

NFORCE SYSTEM MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

Hooray. Owners of nForce can now clock, fiddle and tweak their system on the fly without the need to reboot between changes. A dashboard-like configuration and monitoring page keeps a check on your system, from voltages to temperature, and will yell at you if you overcook things.

ForceWare will be available as a single download, and although NVIDIA has yet to confirm its size or whether the suite will be freely available (and if you'll be asked to pay to unlock certain modules), its core features remain extensive and should help the company win over customers who remain undecided between Radeon and GeForce, and the added performance from the 50 series Detonator may even win a few back.



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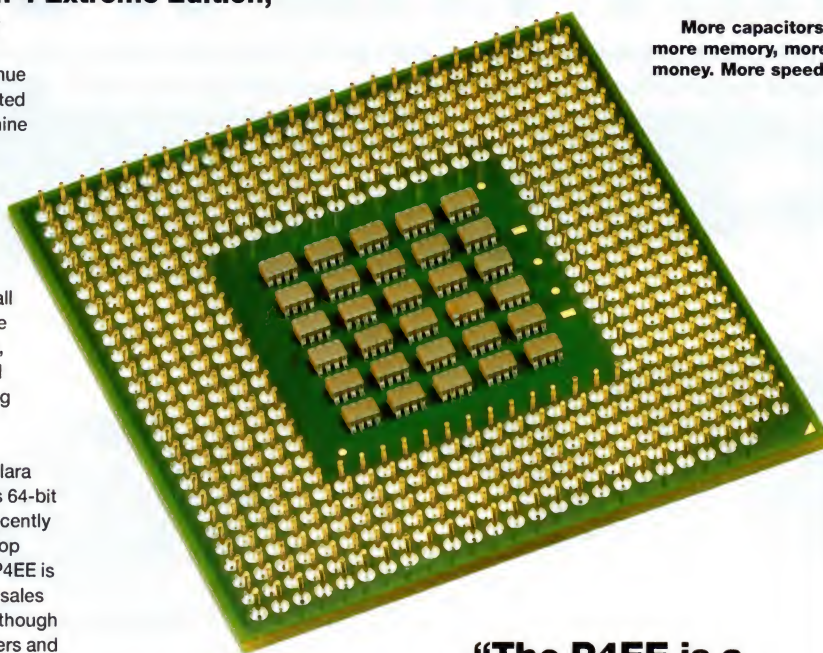
EXTREME MACHINE

Intel talks up Pentium 4 Extreme Edition, but can you afford it?

ALONG WITH third-quarter revenue of eight billion dollars and a predicted fourth-quarter income of close to nine billion, Intel has announced the Pentium 4 Extreme Edition, P4EE for short, a hyper-threading monster with more balls than a bikers' pool hall. The chip operates at 3.2MHz – yes, we've been here before – but along with all the high-powered goodness you've come to expect from big Pentiums, this one features 2MB of additional cache memory and an eye-watering thousand-dollar price tag.

Extreme or not, Intel's sporty newcomer is a way for the Santa Clara marketing guys to piddle on AMD's 64-bit bonfire, the Athlon FX-51 having recently been crowned as the fastest desktop processor available. As such, the P4EE is a niche product designed to dilute sales of another niche product, and fast though it is, only a handful of affluent gamers and moneyed power freaks are likely to slap the plastic and buy one. It's not going to shift in any great numbers, and the price is not likely to drop for months – you can either afford it or you totally can't.

Intel has upped the number of transistors from 55 million on the standard P4 to in excess of 167 million (from the addition of the extra memory, hence the price jump). The chip's 2MB allows data to pool inside fast cache areas in readiness for processing, without the chip having to wait around



More capacitors, more memory, more money. More speed!

for information from areas in much slower RAM. This is what makes the thing so damned fast.

Although not quite as potent as the 64-bit Athlon, the P4EE holds its head high in games, turning in some truly mind-altering benchmarks. With an 18x clock multiplier, 3.6GHz is attainable instantly and without the need to stroke voltages or suffer heat built-up. So if you buy one, be nasty to it.

“The P4EE is a hyper-threading monster with more balls than a bikers' pool hall... and an eye-watering price tag”

FREE HALF-LIFE 2

An end to the confusion

Having announced that *Half-Life 2* will bundle with Radeon XT cards, ATI has uploaded a page explaining exactly what that means. Thousands of posts appeared all over the web with all manner of rumours – from the *HL2* freebie being 'crippled' to ways in which you could get it for free by buying the cheapest Radeon variant, selling it on eBay and then keeping the game. The truth can be had at www.atl.com/online/hl2. In short, the 'bundle' is a coupon redeemable against a full copy of the game (yes, complete with multiplayer support), which you can buy using Steam or at your local games store. And although there are further rumours that hint at ATI including the game with other cards, it's currently an XT-only promotion.

DRIVER WATCH



Time for an update? One look at our chart will tell you

MOTHERBOARD

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Intel	Chipset Software Installation Utility	5.0.2.1003	27-Aug-03	1.4MB	support.intel.com
NVIDIA	nForce	2.45	29-Jul-03	10.4MB	www.nvidia.com
SIS	AGP	1.1.6a	02-Jun-03	5.3MB	download.sis.com
VIA	Hyperion	4.49	20-Aug-03	1.4MB	www.viaarena.com

GRAPHICS

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
ATI	Display, Control Panel, WDM	CATALYST 3.8	08-Oct-03	26MB	www.ati.com
NVIDIA	Detonator FX	52.16	23-Oct-03	8MB	www.nvidia.com

SOUND

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Creative	Audigy 2 WDM Drivers	DriverPack 3	09-May-03	6.88MB	uk.europe.creative.com
M-Audio	Revolution	5.10.00.0051	04-Sep-03	10MB	m-audio.com

SNIPPETS

CRE-ATI-VE

Along with an official announcement of the launch of Creative Jukebox Zen Xtra, a £350 smart-looking MP3/WMA player with Apple-inspired backlit screen and 60GB hard disc, rumours abound that Creative will be bringing their Asian-market-only ATI cards to the UK. Until now, only ASUS has offered both GeForce and Radeon in their range. Creative's huge marketing clout should mean an interesting time in the graphics market, especially with recent NVIDIA cards shown to be benching higher than those from ATI. europe.creative.com



MICROSOFT GOES TILT

Tilt Wheel Technology adds a tilting, horizontal movement to the standard scroll wheel on Microsoft's Wireless Optical Mouse and Wireless IntelliMouse Explorer, allowing you to zip left and right across pages, as well as up and down in the traditional manner. It seems like a logical progression, and initial testing reveals it works – and works rather well. With an uncharacteristic nod to the unconventional, you can even order one in black leather. My only complaint is that Microsoft has yet to release a cabled mouse with the technology. microsoft.com/uk/hardware



ABIT MORE

Into tweaking? ABIT Computer's OC Guru utility lets you ramp up the processor's external clock (ie front-side bus) and voltage, plus AGP and DDR voltages simply by dragging sliders and choosing combinations from drop-down menus. As with NVIDIA's ForceWare, the settings are saved to the BIOS, applied immediately, and the results apparent without the need to reboot. Manufacturer-approved tools like this pretty much cajole users into overclocking their systems and accepting it as the norm, which it isn't. The Dear Wendy letterbox will soon be flapping like a rooster on a merry-go-round. www.abit.com.tw



THE BEST GRAPHICS CARDS ...IN THE WORLD

There are more graphics cards on sale than there are stars in the sky.
Phil Wand assembles 16 of the best for a gruelling once-over

IT'S THE question that gets asked the most – which graphics card? In an attempt to provide you with answers, we assembled 16 of the latest video cards to put through the mill.

And rather than run a small number of tests using a variety of resolutions and quality settings, we chose nine benchmarks to give a broad spectrum of price and performance. The range of scores enables you to draw comparisons yourself – six of the nine benching tools are freely downloadable, and will show you how your own card fares.

Antialiasing and anisotropic filtering are still fashion accessories for most gamers. The enhancements they bring to the overall image quality range from minor to questionable, plus their added calculations punish all bar the fastest hardware and can turn fluid games into hesitant ones. What's more, because they're disabled by default, only a minority of people ever use them to best effect. And as any fan of first-person shooters will attest, frame rate is all.

TEST NOTES

All tests were carried out on a 3.06GHz Pentium 4 machine with 512MB RAM and Windows

XP Professional. Detonator 52.16 drivers were used for GeForce variants, and Catalyst 3.8 for the Radeons.

The lack of NVIDIA Ultra variants isn't in any way deliberate. Manufacturers were asked to submit products from their budget, mid-range and high performance catalogues, and for no obvious reason every GeForce arrived 'plain clothed'. A last-second call to ASUS secured us its 5900 in a party frock, the big momma Ultra. Good job too, as it tied for the top performance trophy with the Radeon 9800XT.

There was one casualty and fatality. The MSI 5900 required 'modifications' to the pillars that support its enormous heat sink

before it would clear the Intel motherboard's memory banks – basically, the card is too large and may require surgery, depending on your set-up. The Sapphire 9800 Pro Ultimate Edition 128MB ceased working during its first benchmark, close inspection revealing that its

distinct radiator wasn't making full contact with the VPU. The 9800 chip had most probably deep-fried itself.

On the software front, only *Halo* caused problems, crashing out regularly and requesting that I send in 'problem reports'. I decided that Microsoft must have had enough of these things from disgruntled customers by now, the game being wobblier than a one-legged bar stool, and so rebooted instead. Up yours, *Halo*.

WINNERS AND LOSERS

NVIDIA sent me its 52.16 drivers seconds before I began the mammoth task of scoring the cards (the tests took a total of 23 hours, 27 minutes, fact fans).

And GeForce fans will be glad it did – the series 50 Detonator set offers sizeable performance gains in key areas. My only warning is that they don't seem quite 'together' just yet – for example, they manage to turn *Battlefield 1942* into a psychedelic quilt of brightly

coloured textures and missing polygons. So if you're a *BF* player, keep a hold of your series 40 Detonators until Sierra releases an update.

Top of the shop for outright power were the two ASUS cards, the new Radeon 9800XT and FX 5900 Ultra, although neither are for the budget-conscious. Both offerings boast some of the lowest Wandymark™ scores of any card (see page 142), and the XT undoes everything I've said about ATI stuff being competitively priced.

Truth be told, I was expecting the 9800XT to neck ahead, and if you look closely at the charts

For value, Gigabyte's 9600 Pro is out in front and really can't be beaten on price or performance. ATI's dominance of the mid-range sector started with the 9500 Pro, and it looks set to continue – the MSI FX 5600 mounted the one and only real challenge for the middleweight crown, but it was one that the Radeon swatted aside without even blinking.

As for entry-level hardware, sales figures suggest that NVIDIA are kings of the budget arena. However, results here show the FX 5200 stopping to get its breath back while the Radeon 9200 strides ahead – added to which, Gigabyte's 9200 is second only to the 9600 Pro for value. The poor 5200 suffers what can only be described as apoplexy if you're mad enough to add antialiasing and anisotropic filtering. Plus, if you want to play your games at 1280x1024 – hardly too much to ask, given that it's the native resolution of our favourite flat screens – you'll need to save up for a bigger, better card.

"They managed to turn *Battlefield 1942* into a psychedelic quilt of brightly coloured textures"

RD ROUND-UP

BENCHMARKS OVERVIEW (see page 142 for combined scores and the all-new 'Wandymark')

IF A CARD'S GOING TO MAKE IT IN OUR WORLD, IT'S GOING TO HAVE TO PROVE ITS WORTH. HERE'S WHAT WE USED TO TEST 'EM



3DMARK2001

The bench that started it all. Before broadband, the Mad Onion package was a mad ass download, but everyone into their shooters had a copy tucked away somewhere. It's old and doesn't touch recent technologies, but it's still one of the easiest ways to compare performance. Just hit go.

www.futuremark.com



AQUAMARK3

The Krass engine that provides the shove behind Aquamark3 features DX9 rendering, environmental effects, a particle system and flexible body physics. The developers claim it provides three ways of testing your card not found in other tests. It's as boring as they come, and certainly tested me.

www.aquamark3.com



X2

Easily the most bewitching benchmark here, and certainly one of the most demanding, this DX9 rolling demo has a grossly annoying habit of jumping frame rates on budget hardware, making it impossible to watch. That aside, it does an excellent job of making you want the game on which it was based.

www.egosoft.com



3DMARK03

The source of controversy surrounding NVIDIA 'cheating' its scores, 3DMark03 is arguably the world's most popular video benchmark. It comprises one DX7 test, two DX8 tests, plus a single (and somewhat punishing) DX9 test, known to all as Mother Nature.

www.futuremark.com



COMANCHE 4

The best known chopper game still plays beautifully on any video card. Added to which, it has its own benchmark, even if it does look somewhat angular and dated alongside more recent entrants. We initially ran the test 800x600, then at 1280x1024 with antialiasing.

www.novalogic.com



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003

A pretty, popular and office fave first-person shooter, *Unreal Tournament* makes for easy scoring – the benchmarking folder contains a number of preset tests. Due to popular demand, we've reverted to the Antalus level, and provide vanilla and AA/AF settings for quality and speed comparison.

www.unrealtournament2003.com



FINAL FANTASY XI

Small people with pointy ears and perma-smiles really aren't my cup of tea, but *FF* remains an enduringly popular title. The demo for the 11th release includes a benchmark, which we ran in high resolution mode. I'm just waiting for someone smart to hack in and grant me a chaingun.

www.playonline.com/ff11us



TOMB RAIDER: ANGEL OF DARKNESS

Either I've gotten bigger or her boobs have gotten smaller. To run the DX9 benchmark, we downloaded the 0.49 patch – the upgrade NVIDIA deleted as it includes a test loop that shows the GeForce floundering – and followed the instructions to replay the provided Paris3 demo.

www.eidos.com



HALO

Jeez, is this game a pig. It's unplayable with AA and AF even on the very fastest cards available, and constantly bombs out on budget hardware. It being an old console title makes it even worse. Any score is a good score, as far as I'm concerned.

www.microsoft.com/games

SAPPHIRE RADEON 9800 PRO ATLANTIS 256MB

Price: £370 | Manufacturer: Sapphire | Phone: N/A | www.sapphiretech.com

HARDWARE 256MB ATI Radeon 9800 Pro

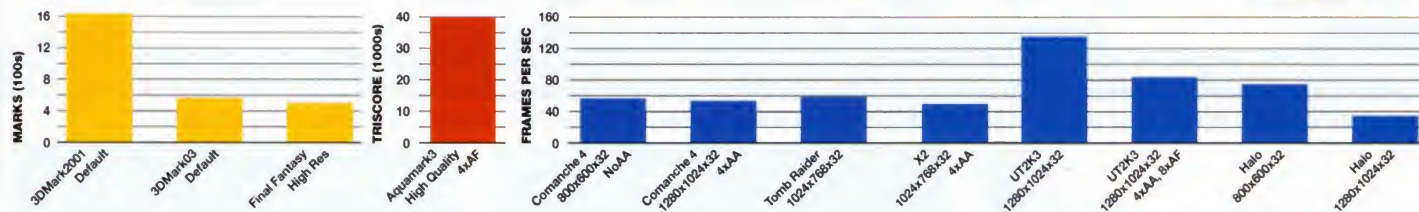
ANCILLARIES VGA to DVI converter, S-video to S-video, S-video to composite female, composite male to composite male, power splitter

BUNDLE Return To Castle Wolfenstein, Soldier Of Fortune II, PowerDVD XP, PowerDirector Pro VE, Sapphire Utilities, Installation CD

✓ Faster and heavier than a freight train, plenty of goodies
✗ Double-take price tag

86

● Let's hope Santa can stretch



SAPPHIRE RADEON 9600 PRO ATLANTIS 128MB

Price: £145 | Manufacturer: Sapphire | Phone: N/A | www.sapphiretech.com

HARDWARE 128MB ATI Radeon 9600 Pro

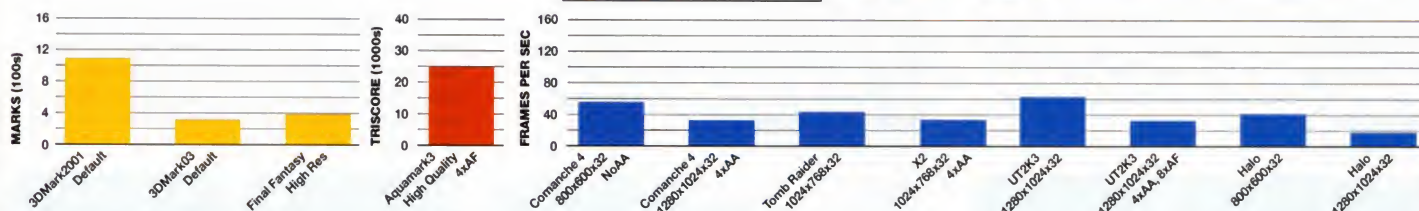
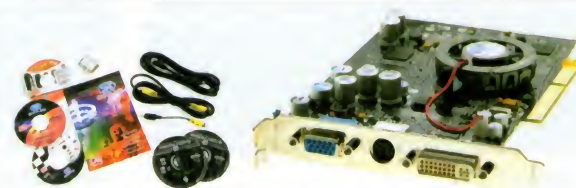
ANCILLARIES VGA to DVI converter, S-video to S-video, S-video to composite female, composite male to composite male

BUNDLE Soldier Of Fortune II, PowerDVD XP, Sapphire Utilities, Installation CD

✓ Strong middleweight contender with a decent bundle to boot
✗ The Gigabyte is cheaper

85

● Decent card for decent money



CREATIVE BLASTER 5 FX5600 256MB

Price: £115 | Manufacturer: Creative Labs | Phone: N/A | europe.creative.com

HARDWARE 256MB NVIDIA GeForce FX 5600

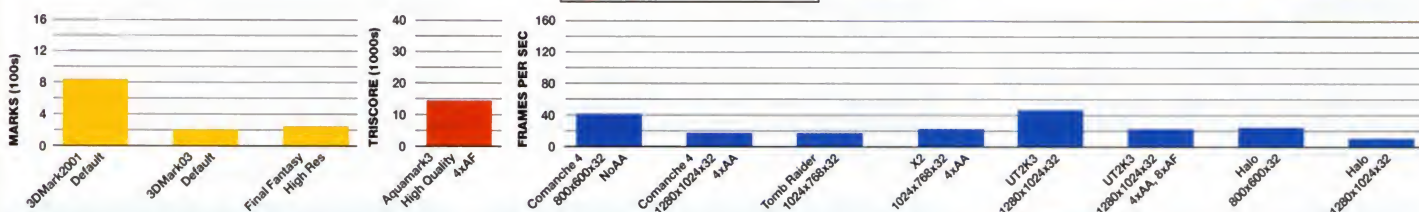
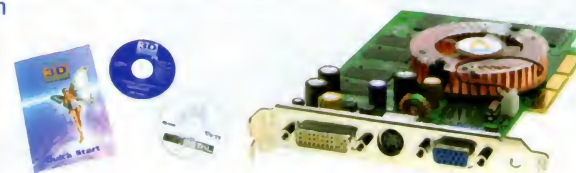
ANCILLARIES None

BUNDLE Gunmetal, Installation CD

✓ No-nonsense package, economically priced
✗ Underwhelming performance

72

● More memory than muscles



CREATIVE BLASTER 5 FX5900 128MB

Price: £210 | Manufacturer: Creative Labs | Phone: N/A | europe.creative.com

HARDWARE 128MB NVIDIA GeForce FX 5900

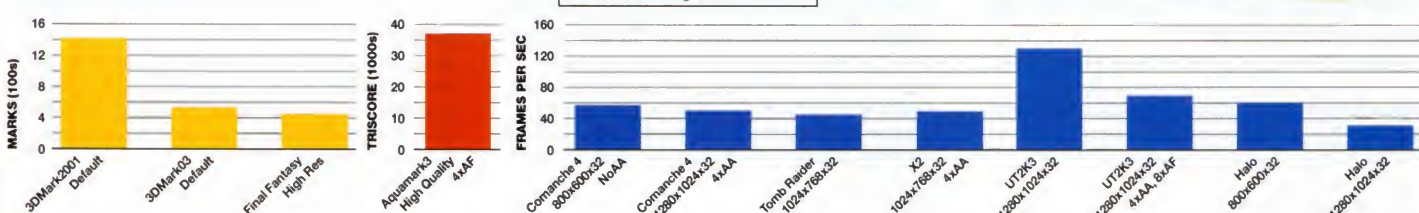
ANCILLARIES Power splitter

BUNDLE Gunmetal, Installation CD

✓ Reasonably gussy, feasible price tag
✗ The 9600XT is a better buy

80

● Shouldn't be ignored



SPARKLE GEFORCE FX 5200 128MB

Price: £64 | Manufacturer: Sparkle Computer | Phone: N/A | www.sparkle-technology.co.uk

HARDWARE 128MB NVIDIA GeForce FX 5200

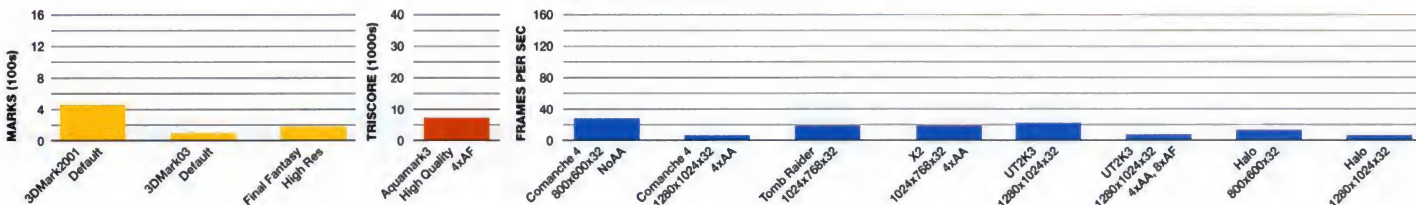
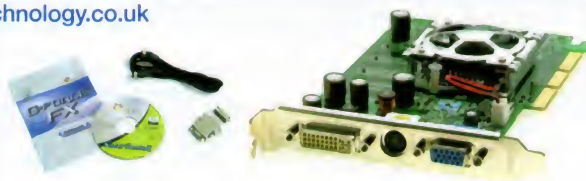
ANCILLARIES VGA to DVI converter, S-video to S-video

BUNDLE Installation CD

- ✓ Cheap and cheerful
- ✗ You could draw the pixels faster

74

- For the budget conscious



SPARKLE GEFORCE FX 5600 VIVO 128MB

Price: £159 | Manufacturer: Sparkle Computer | Phone: N/A | www.sparkle-technology.co.uk

HARDWARE 128MB NVIDIA GeForce FX 5600

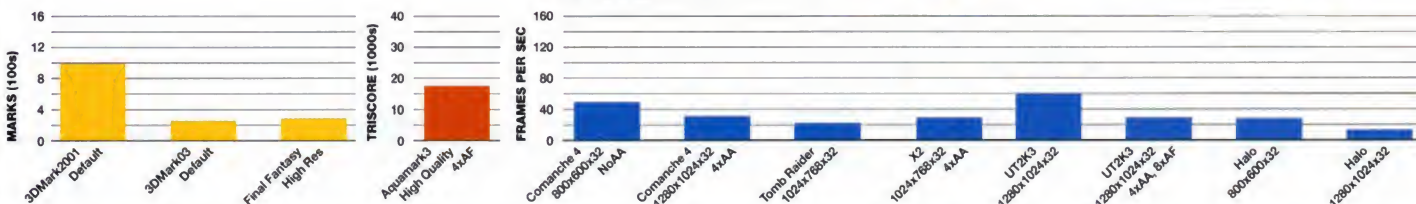
ANCILLARIES VGA to DVI converter, S-video to S-video, VIVO cable whip

BUNDLE PowerProducer ME, Installation CD

- ✓ Not bad performance
- ✗ Radeon 9600 Pro owners picking on you

77

- For home-movie makers



SPARKLE GEFORCE FX 5900 128MB

Price: £279 | Manufacturer: Sparkle Computer | Phone: N/A | www.sparkle-technology.co.uk

HARDWARE 128MB NVIDIA GeForce FX 5900

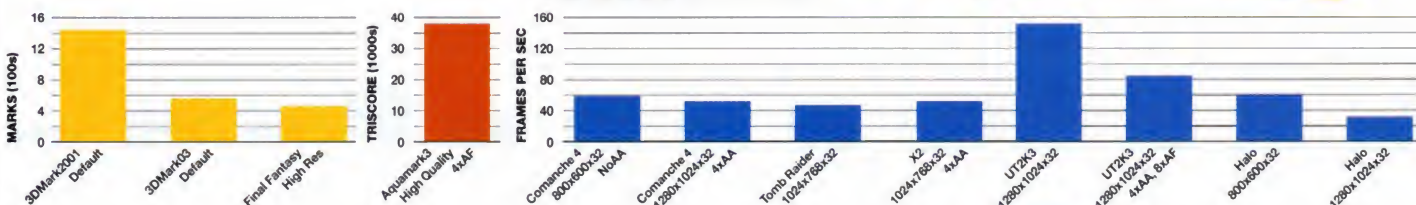
ANCILLARIES VGA to DVI converter, S-video to S-video, SCART junction, power splitter

BUNDLE Morrowind, Ghost Recon, PowerDVD XP, Installation CD

- ✓ Retail packaging, decent performance
- ✗ A bit noisy, no turbo

79

- Commendable



HERCULES 3D PROPHET 9800 128MB

Price: £225 | Manufacturer: Hercules | Phone: 020 8665 1881 | europe.hercules.com

HARDWARE 128MB ATI Radeon 9800

ANCILLARIES VGA to DVI converter, S-video to S-video, S-video to composite female, composite male to composite male, power splitter

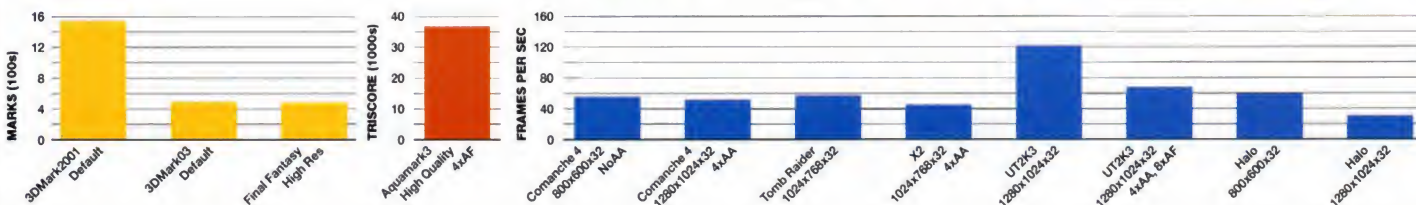
BUNDLE Vietcong, PowerDVD, Installation CD

- ✓ Rounded performer, snazzy Hercules design
- ✗ The runt of the 9800 litter

83

- Better than you think

WORTH CONSIDERING



GAINWARD PRO/760 XP GOLDEN SAMPLE VIVO 128MB

Price: £180 | Manufacturer: Gainward | Phone: 020 8665 1881 | europe.hercules.com

HARDWARE 128MB NVIDIA GeForce FX 5200 Ultra

ANCILLARIES VGA to DVI converter, power splitter, VIVO cable whip

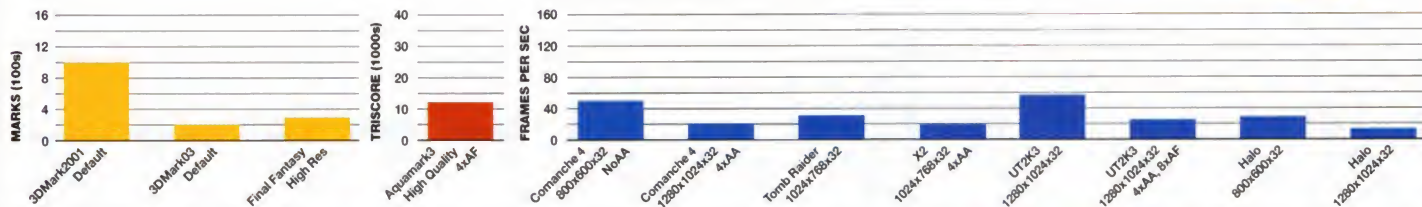
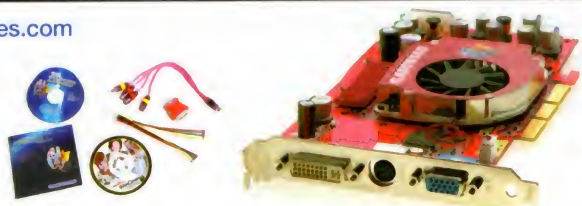
BUNDLE Intervideo WinCinema, Installation CD

✓ A decent performer

✗ How much?

68

● Makes more sense to buy a Yoko Ono album



GIGABYTE RADEON 9200 128MB

Price: £78 | Manufacturer: Gigabyte | Phone: 01908 362700 | uk.giga-byte.com

HARDWARE 128MB ATI Radeon 9200

ANCILLARIES VGA to DVI converter, S-video to S-video and composite whip

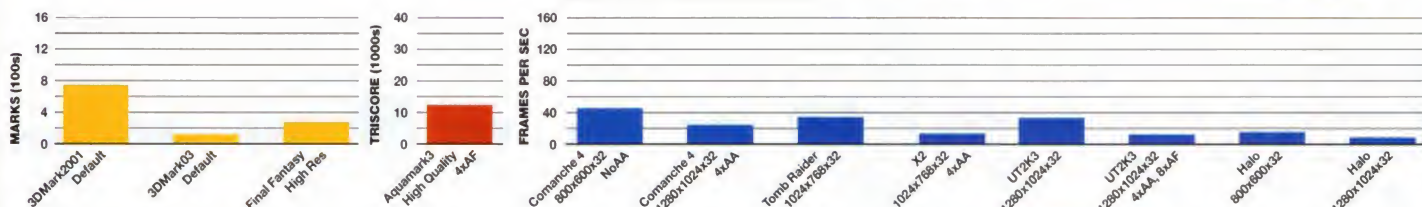
BUNDLE Will Rock, PowerDVD 5, Installation CD

✓ Good entry-level product

✗ Same grunt from 64MB but half the cost

88

● Does the job



GIGABYTE RADEON 9600 PRO 128MB

Price: £122 | Manufacturer: Gigabyte | Phone: 01908 362700 | uk.giga-byte.com

HARDWARE 128MB ATI Radeon 9600 Pro

ANCILLARIES VGA to DVI converter, S-video to S-video and composite whip

BUNDLE Raven Shield, Tomb Raider AOD, Will Rock, PowerDVD 5, Installation CD

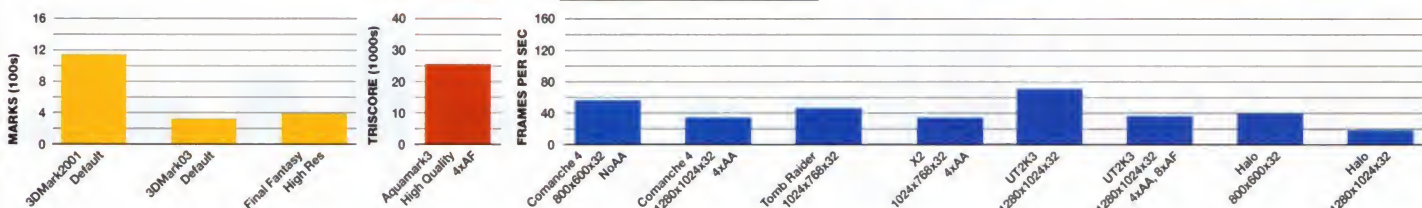


✓ Superb value, great performance

✗ Stickers on box not level with one another

90

● Really rather good



MSI FX5200-TD128 128MB

Price: £63 | Manufacturer: MSI | Phone: 020 8813 6688 | www.msicomputer.co.uk

HARDWARE 128MB NVIDIA GeForce FX 5200

ANCILLARIES None

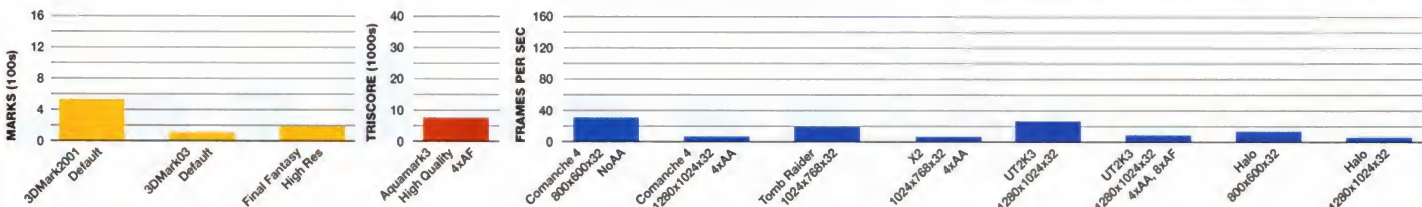
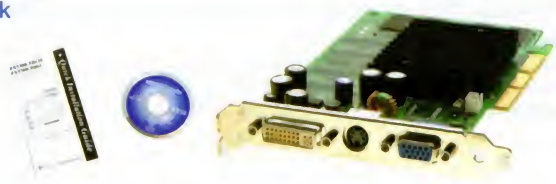
BUNDLE Installation CD

✓ Cheap and noiseless

✗ Meagre bundle, unnecessary memory

75

● First rung on the DX9 ladder



MSI FX5600-TD128 128MB

Price: £108 | Manufacturer: MSI | Phone: 020 8813 6688 | www.msicomputer.co.uk

HARDWARE 128MB NVIDIA GeForce FX 5600

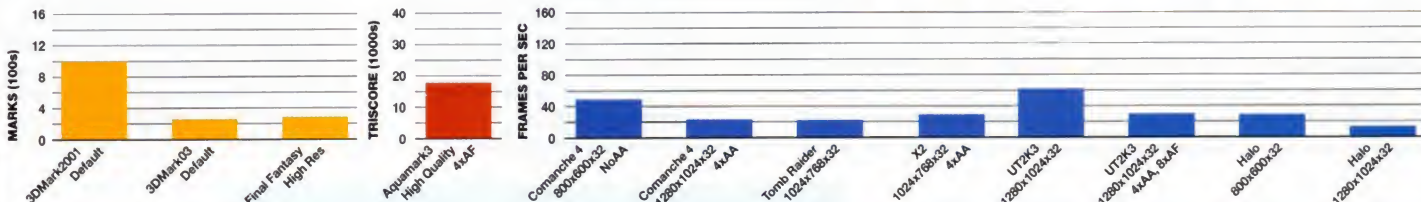
ANCILLARIES VGA to DVI converter, S-video to composite

BUNDLE Morrowind, Ghost Recon, Duke Nukem Manhattan Project, Games Collection (7 games), RestoreIT! Pro, VirtualDrive Pro, WinDVD 5.1, MSI Media Center, Installation CD

- ✓ Stunning value, huge bundle, thick manual
- ✗ Nothing obvious

82

● Thumbs up



MSI FX5900SP-VTD256 256MB

Price: £300 | Manufacturer: MSI | Phone: 020 8813 6688 | www.msicomputer.co.uk

HARDWARE 256MB NVIDIA GeForce FX 5900

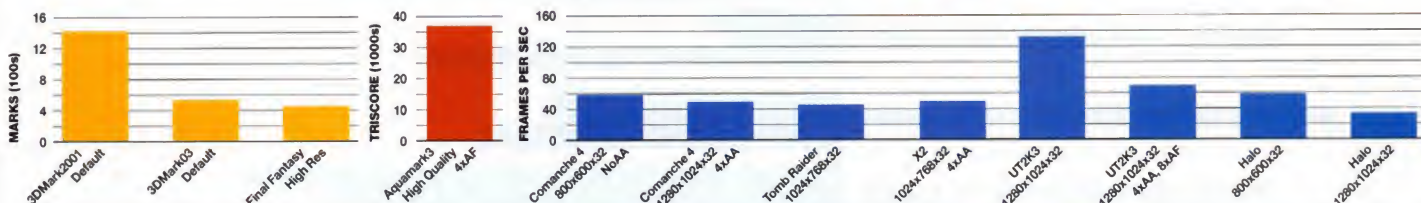
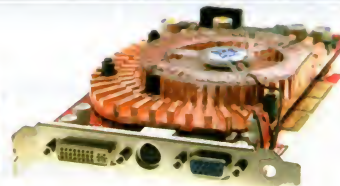
ANCILLARIES VGA to DVI converter, S-video to S-video, VIVO junction, power splitter

BUNDLE Morrowind, Ghost Recon, Duke Nukem Manhattan Project, Games Collection (7 games), RestoreIT! Pro, VirtualDrive Pro, WinDVD 5.1, WinDVD Creator, SuperPack, MSI Media Center, Installation CD

- ✓ Box packed tighter than a camel's arse in a sandstorm
- ✗ Is the 256MB really necessary?

78

● Too much money



ASUS V9950 ULTRA 256MB

Price: £380 | Manufacturer: ASUS | Phone: 01908 518000 | www.asus.com

HARDWARE 256MB NVIDIA GeForce FX 5900 Ultra

ANCILLARIES VGA to DVI converter, S-video to male composite

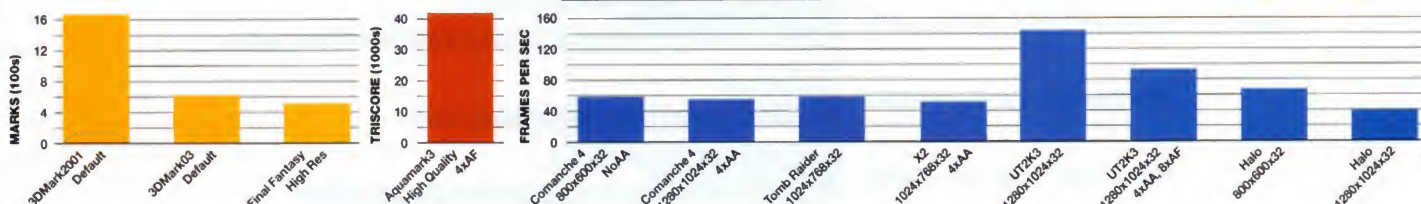
BUNDLE Gunmetal, Battle Engine Aquila, Games Collection (6 games), Installation CD



- ✓ Great presentation, great games, super quick
- ✗ Your credit card statement

87

● Fast, beautiful, pricey



ASUS RADEON 9800XT 256MB

Price: £415 | Manufacturer: ASUS | Phone: 01908 518000 | www.asus.com

HARDWARE 256MB ATI Radeon 9800XT

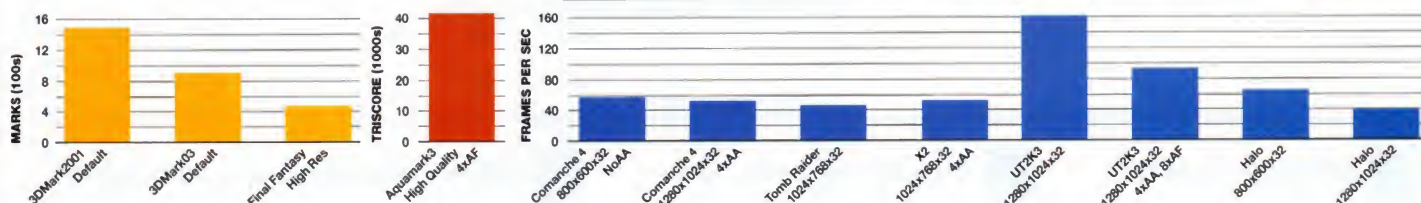
ANCILLARIES VGA to DVI converter, VIVO junction

BUNDLE Half-Life 2 coupon, Gunmetal, Battle Engine Aquila, Games Collection (6 games), PowerDirector Pro, ASUSDVD XP, Ulead Cool 3D SE, Ulead Photo Express SE, MediaShow SE, Installation CD

- ✓ Magical power, low noise
- ✗ More expensive than fried dolphin

87

● Jet-propelled ride to poverty



SCORES ON THE DOORS

You've marvelled at the benchmark tests and surveyed the cards – it's now time for total enlightenment

Getting the right graphics card for your machine and the game you're playing can mean the difference between a smooth-sailing ride or a stuttering nightmare of an afternoon or evening – ney, weekend. But don't despair; your trusty mate Wendy is here to help. Over the last few pages you've read about each cards'

performance in the benchmark tests. But if that's not enough, we've combined all the scores and placed them next to the street price and our new, patented Wandymark™ to give you a clear picture of what to buy. It's time, as Paul Daniels once whined at that Blaine-esque stage in his career, to pick a card, any card...

COMBINED

The combined score takes an average across all frame-based benchmarks. In other words, it adds them all together and divides them by the number of tests used to create it. The higher the number, the more powerful the card. Isn't logic a marvellous thing?

WANDYMARK™

The Wandymark™ – unique to PC ZONE of course – takes the combined benchmarks score and divides it by the cost of the hardware to show a good representation of value. A higher Wandymark™ means a higher frame rate for every penny you spend, or more 'bangs for your buck'.

SAPPHIRE RADEON 9800 PRO ATLANTIS 256MB

SAPPHIRE RADEON 9600 PRO ATLANTIS 128MB

CREATIVE BLASTER 5 FX5600 256MB

CREATIVE BLASTER 5 FX5900 128MB

SPARKLE GEFORCE FX 5200 128MB

SPARKLE GEFORCE FX 5600 VIVO 128MB

SPARKLE GEFORCE FX 5900 128MB

HERCULES 3D PROPHET 9800 128MB

GAINWARD PRO/760 XP GS VIVO 128MB

GIGABYTE RADEON 9200 128MB

GIGABYTE RADEON 9600 PRO 128MB

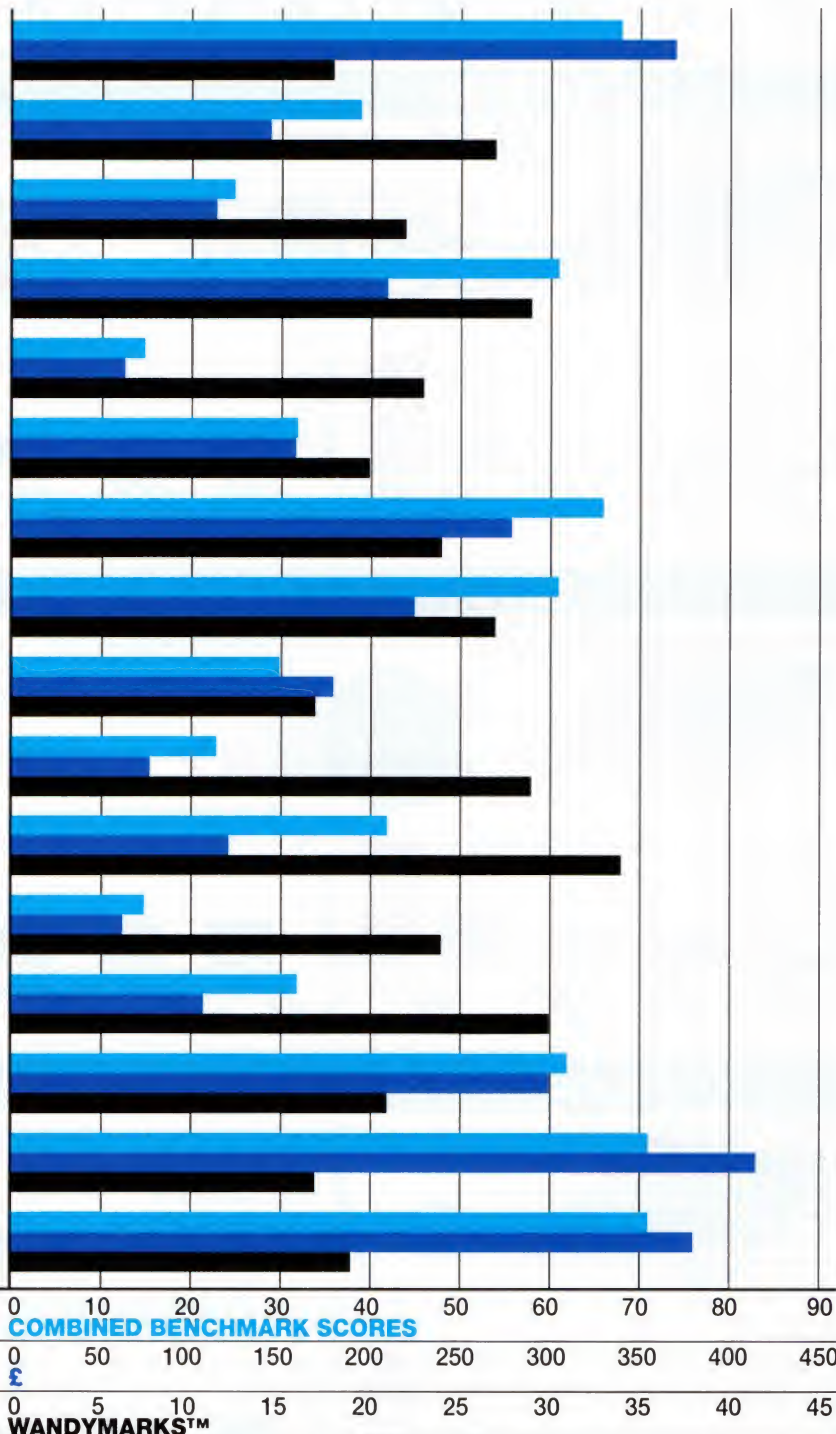
MSI FX5200-TD128 128MB

MSI FX5600-TD128 128MB

MSI FX5900SP-VTD256 256MB

ASUS RADEON 9800XT 256MB

ASUS V9950 ULTRA 256MB



AVERAGE COMBINED

STREET PRICE (INC. VAT) £

PRICE/PERFORMANCE WANDYMARKS™

My adrenaline rush
isn't what it used to be.
Double the dose.

AMD
me.



Simply the most amazing gaming engine there is. Introducing the AMD Athlon™ 64 FX processor. See the whites of your enemy's eyes. Get all the screaming tyres, flying sparks and white knuckles you can take. Ramp up from 32- to 64-bit and you get the power to wreak total havoc. Long may you reign. Get the AMD Athlon 64 FX edge at www.amd.com/athlon64fx



DEAR WANDY

Spot of bother with your computer? Trouble with your software, can't control your hardware? Write in for expert PC advice. No job too small

■ **HANDY ANDY:** Phil Wand

LET IT ALL OUT

Share your techie or gaming-related problems with us, and we, in turn, may well share them with thousands of readers via these very pages in a big communal love-in-type thing.

Write to Dear Wandy, PC ZONE, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD

Email Address your letters to us at wandy@dearwandy.com with the subject heading 'Dear Wandy'. Please note: while we can assure you that we read absolutely every techie query sent to us, we are unable to offer personal replies. Sorry.

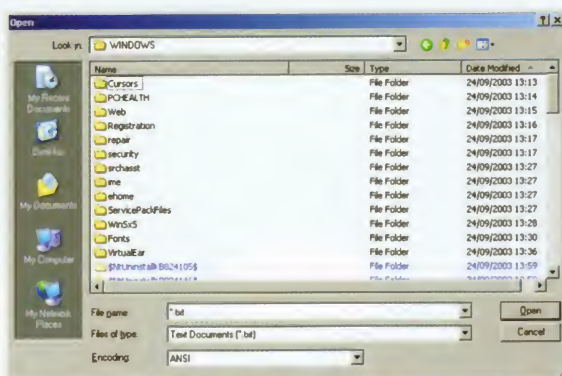
BOOTIFUL PACKARD

Several months ago, I upgraded the video card in my Athlon-based Packard Bell from a 32MB ATI Radeon VE to a 128MB GeForce4 MX440 as advised by PC World. On three occasions, I lost the BIOS settings that stopped the machine shutting down; it just kept rebooting. I rang the helpline and was informed that the "motherboard needed replacing" and that an engineer would turn up this coming Friday. The engineer duly appeared, replaced the board, but the fault remained. After mucking about for half an hour, he decided that the video card was either broken or had faulty drivers, so it was removed and replaced with the old Radeon. Off went the engineer. Once he had gone, I rebooted the machine and the fault was evidently still there, looping to the XP login prompt, shutting down, and then rebooting.

I again rang the helpline, who assisted me in getting the machine running, but a complete system restore was required, which reset the machine to the state it was in when it was bought from the shop. I spent six hours reinstalling all the software but found most of the games wouldn't play, so I put the GeForce4 back in and everything seems to be fine now. The question being, can a graphics card cause this problem or was the engineer talking out the back of his neck?

Roy Tams

A I'm confused, and my response is going to reflect that. Losing your BIOS settings is often a sign that your CMOS battery has



Can you tell how these folders are being ordered? A quick registry tweak solves the madness.

chucked up the sponge, or that you have a virus (the old Mypics Worm takes a bite out of your CMOS settings and generally make a nuisance). There are other possible explanations, such as a duff BIOS version, but they're not as likely.

The way PC World told you to replace your hardware makes it sound as if it's something fundamental – certain Packard Bell machines reboot intermittently because of a conflict between ACPI and APM power management, but if you ask me that's an issue that can be worked around without ripping out the main board. There's also a high probability that your machine has a VIA chipset, something that is known to cause random hangs and reboots, but a simple update from viaarena.com may help here. And if you're running DirectX, Microsoft admitted last year to glaring errors in the DirectX 8 code that caused AMD machines to fall over, but you can cure this – you guessed it – by updating DirectX. So I'm as perplexed as you are.

That said, I think the answer lies in your complete reinstall, the engineer's diagnosis being half right. Although you don't say whether you used updated drivers, I'd suggest that in the

process of 'starting over' you may have unwittingly cleansed your machine of a virus (probably the Blaster Worm, the prime symptom of which is rebooting in Windows XP and 2000) and also rid your system of any remnants of the old ATI card. As for your BIOS, because you didn't explain fully whether your motherboard was replaced during the engineer's visit, I can't comment on how your machine is now magically retaining its settings.

XP OFF

Q This is so stupid, but I can't find a solution. I have an Evesham PC running Windows XP Pro, and for some reason I cannot fathom, all the folder lists seem to display randomly instead of in alphabetical order. I don't recall changing any settings but it does this in every single program – Excel, Word, CorelDraw, all of them. What I'm having to do at the moment is open the folder, hit the Views button and select Details, then click on the Name column. I have to do this every time and it's seriously driving me mental.

There must be some setting somewhere to display my files in alphabetical order, but I can't find it. Like I said, this such a stupid thing, but if you know of a solution to it, you'll save my sanity.

Richard Bown

A The machine I use for gaming runs Windows XP Pro and I try not to use it for everyday stuff. The fact I have to spend 20 minutes reconfiguring fresh installs of said operating system to look less like a preschooler's lunchbox and more like a computer means I'm still very wary of it. Additionally, XP has far too many by-default nuisances and dolt-oriented features, the result of Microsoft wrongly assuming that every user is an imbecile who wouldn't know a pile of shit from a pudding.

When you call up an Open or Save dialog box in XP, the columns are ordered by the date they were last modified, folders included. So absolutely everything appears higgledy-piggledy, and people like you and I are forced to take beta blockers later in life. Not only that, but you'll find the 'Date Modified' column is scrolled off the side of the screen. To cut a long rant short you need to download dearwandy.com/files/xp_opensave.reg and merge its details with your registry (just double-click to open it). It makes your default order the sensible one.

UPGRADE DAZE 1

Q As a relative newbie to this gaming malarkey, I've come to the conclusion that the more I know the less I understand. I've had an AMD Athlon XP 2000, 512MB and a GeForce4 MX440 for a year now, and already feel the need to upgrade – all ZONE's fault, of course – in preparation for the likes of *Half-Life 2*, *Doom 3* and so on. Is there any point putting an 8x AGP card in my 4x motherboard, or has the whole lot got to go? I have about £300 to spend, but could stretch to more. As I have yet to take a screwdriver to my PC, would a ready assembled upgrade kit be

"With XP, Microsoft wrongly assumed that every user is an imbecile who wouldn't know a pile of shit from a pudding"

"It's always worth registering every hardware product you purchase as, unlike software, they wear out over time"

the answer, perhaps combined with a Radeon 9600 Pro?

Andrew Keen

A There's nothing wrong with the setup you have right now. A two-litre processor (well, what amounts to a two-litre processor, in AMD-speak) and half a gig of RAM is a good foundation for any gaming system. Yes, *Half-Life 2* and its ilk will make it sweat like a galley slave, but you have to expect tomorrow's games to play best on tomorrow's hardware. My advice would be to junk the MX440 and replace it with the best video card you can afford, which in your case is the 128MB Radeon 9800 Pro. By the time you read this, ATI's latest XT models may have helped depress the price of the 9800 a little, and you might have enough leftover to buy yourself a new keyboard and optical mouse (like buying a new pair of shoes, it's amazing how much pleasure new peripherals can bring).

Worry about updating the rest of your system when the time comes – probably in the January sales – because the hunky Raddy will give it a whole new lease on life and you'll begin to wonder why you ever thought of getting shot of it.

UPGRADE DAZE 2

Q I have to buy a new graphics card – at the moment I'm stuck with the pansy-powered 128MB MX440. I'm not writing to slate the MX, but *Half-Life 2* is on the way. With a budget of £100, should I choose Nvidia or ATI? I had three cards in mind: a GeForce4 Ti4200, a GeForce FX5200 Ultra and an ATI Radeon 9600. Are all these DirectX 9 compliant?

P Gonzalez

A The Ti4200 is a good value card but is not for DirectX 9, and you'll find the GeForce FX5200 Ultra a little

slow, especially if you intend using it to play *Half-Life 2*. Your best bet is the Radeon 9600, or else look online – eBay is always a good start – for a previously enjoyed 9500 Pro. For an extra £30 you might even find yourself a nice 9700 Pro. As I mentioned elsewhere, the new XT cards will help push down the price of existing products.

FLAT WRONG

Q I read with interest the review of Hitachi's CML174SXW screen and have two questions. Firstly, what graphics cards suitable for gaming are ideal for this monitor? Is it worth waiting for 64-bit and/or PCI Express hardware to arrive and what kind of improvement will this make to gaming? Second, the review mentions the monitor going into the Editor's Choice section of the Buyer's Guide, but there the model number is listed as CML15SXW and the response time is noted as being 12ms. Is this an error?

Chris Thompson

A To answer your first question(s), you can use any PC graphics card with any PC monitor, and flat panels are no different – the video card produces a signal, the screen displays it. As for waiting for 64-bit processors and PCI Express, that's the oldest question in the book. Bear in mind that something is always around the corner, and it's up to you to decide whether or not you want to wait for it. PCI Express offers significant speed improvements over existing technology, but consider how long it took for plain PCI to sideline ISA and you'll understand that it's not about to suddenly outdate all your existing cards.

To answer the second question, the Buyer's Guide was wrong and has since been corrected. Well spotted.

BROADLESS WIRELESS

Q I'm looking to wireless network two PCs, and believe two wireless cards will do the job. I also want to share a 56K modem connection without having to leave one of the PCs permanently powered up, but all the wireless access points I've seen are broadband only. Have you come across a V90 or V92 wireless modem out there that either PC can use without one machine being left on?

Paul

A You'll find many of the more expensive wireless gateways use yesteryear modems as backup for when the ADSL goes AWOL. ZyXEL's Prestige 652HW, their flagship (and my favourite) broadband product, features fail-over to either ISDN or analog modem for when the DSL line drops out; Apple's silly-shaped AirPort Extreme may look like a breast implant but it too has an RJ-11 connector for hooking up to a regular phone line.

I must confess that, strange as it may seem, I've never used an ADSL gateway without an ADSL line and so can't vouch for its suitability. In theory it should work, but if anyone else has a better idea, get in touch and let me know.

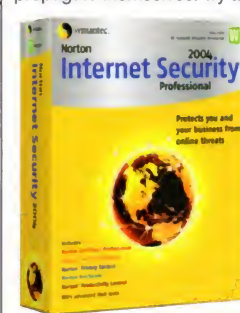


The 9500 Pro is such a good card, Wandy can't help mentioning it at least once a month. Obsolete it may be, pants it ain't.

WANDY'S TOP TIPS

The recent theft of *Half-Life 2*'s source code shows that even the biggest industry names haven't taken sufficient precautions to keep morons out of their networks. While Valve is obviously a big target, everyone on the Internet is fair game – people with 'always on' broadband connections are most at risk and must have the right combination of hardware and software to defend themselves against attacks. Here's a few basic tips:

■ Stop using Outlook. Many viruses use such programs to propagate themselves. Try an alternative, such as Eudora.



Norton Internet Security 2004 gives you pretty much everything you need in one box: AntiVirus, Personal Firewall, AntiSpam and more.

Send in your Top Tip to Dear Wandy and win yourself £50.

■ Install anti-virus software. The most recent Norton AntiVirus includes detection for key loggers, the software that enabled hackers to steal *Half-Life 2*.

■ Get a firewall. A hardware firewall is ideal for stopping ne'er-do-wells getting in, a software version is your next best bet.

■ Invest in a spam filter. You'd be surprised at how many viruses are spread by opening junk mail. Never open an attachment unless you requested it!

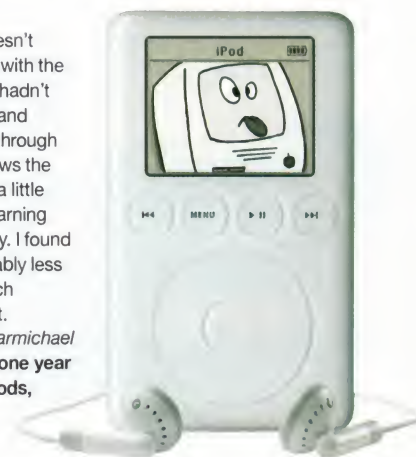
■ Stop using file sharing programs. The likes of KaZaA and WinMX are breeding grounds for Trojans.

BAD APPLE

Q My 10GB iPod doesn't work – it's the one with the touch-scrolling wheel. I hadn't used it for a few weeks and when I tried charging it through the FireWire card, it shows the Apple logo followed by a little picture of iPod with a warning triangle and a sad smiley. I found the Apple site considerably less than useful as well, which surprised me somewhat.

Eddie Carmichael

A Apple provides a one year warranty for all iPods, and if it's all gone horribly wrong you'll need to contact a UK Apple Centre to find out what to do. As yours is an older product, there's a high chance of you being stung for all costs. However, I'd first reset the thing – hold down the Menu and



As with most Apple hardware, descriptive icons are used to show what the product is doing.

Play buttons until the Apple logo appears (see the FAQs at www.info.apple.com/us/en/ipod for more information).

Remember it's always worth registering every hardware product you purchase as, unlike software, they wear out over time. I've found in many cases, registering has the benefit of making you known to the manufacturer and, in the event of something going wrong, your name, address and product serial number should pop up on their database.

Visit Wandy on the web at www.dearwandy.com



WATCHDOG

Suffering a run-around Carl Lewis would be proud of? Copping a customer serve instead of service? Let us kick the proverbial for you...

■ **WRITING THE WRONGS** Adam Phillips

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

If you're at the end of your tether, don't panic – we're here to help. If you've got a consumer problem that needs sorting, drop us a line. A battle to be fought while we're away from our PCs? Bring it on!

WRITE TO Watchdog, PC Zone, Dennis Publishing, 19 Bolsover Street, London W1P 7HJ

EMAIL Alternatively, email us at letters.pczone@dennis.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog'

READ ME!

If you are writing in to complain about a product, please arm us with your full name, address and **contact number**. With PCs, make sure you also include all **purchasing details** such as reference and invoice numbers. More weaponry means bigger victories.



Pete realised that something was not quite right about his Mesh computer...

WHAT A MESH!

Well, they do say that curiosity killed the cat, but sometimes curiosity can simply leave us pissed off. Take Pete Sharpe, who bought himself a Mesh computer before Christmas and was absolutely delighted with its performance.

Well, he was until he read about the plight of another reader in our very own Dear Wandy column. A fellow Mesh buyer, Iain, discovered that his PC was supposed to have come with a Radeon 9700 Pro – but instead, he realised, it was a 9700.

"So I checked my computer as well and, sure enough, my Radeon 9700 Pro was just the plain 9700 vanilla," fumes Pete. "Not a happy bunny, I phoned Mesh and explained the problem. They told me:

'I'm sorry, but there's nothing we can do – any questions

about missing hardware should have been made within the first seven days.' This is taking the piss a bit, because there was a fair price difference between the plain 9700 and the Pro version."

Pete says he's also had to order a new hard drive to replace his knackered one for £100 and a further £40 on fans that have packed it in: "It's become apparent that Mesh are cutting corners and ripping the consumer off," warns Pete. "All other Mesh PC owners should check their system specs. This intended rip-off of the consumer has gone on long enough."

Mesh offered the following explanation: "We have agreed

to supply the intended 9700 Pro graphics card," explains a spokesperson. "We apologise for the discrepancy but at the time of build last year, we did ship a small number of straight 9700 cards in error. At the time, we were able to contact many to arrange a swap out – unfortunately Peter appears not to have been contacted at the time."

Righto, that's that sorted then. Well, apart from Pete's initial enquiry being met with the 'within seven days' garbage – surely the customer service spud should have been aware of the graphics card cock-up if it was a known mistake, as Mesh says it was.

In the meantime, what really perplexed Watchdog was Pete having to cough up for a replacement hard drive and fan – well, we would have thought these would have been covered by the warranty.

And Mesh agrees with us: "Peter should contact our technical support department concerning the hard drive and CPU fan," says Mesh. "The PC is still under a comprehensive hardware parts and labour warranty, and as such, is something we are able to assist him with – without out any component charge to him."

AMAZ-WRONG...

There's nowt like a bad case of crossed wires. They can cause arguments, fall-outs and the odd war. In this case, Yijian Fong is out for blood, preferably Amazon's, whom he says have been dragging their heels.

Having asked his dad to order him a game from the e-tailer, Yijian then waited for Amazon to deliver the goodies. And waited. He sent them reminder emails, but says he heard nothing back from



No smoke without fire, BT?

Amazon. "Amazon hasn't dispatched the item for a week now, which really takes the mick!" fumes Yijian.

Amazon says their customer services have looked into the matter "and it appears that the reason for the initial delay was that the customer had ordered an item from the site that was on pre-order," the company says. "As with all pre-orders, we were unable to dispatch the item until the official release date. After the release date though, there was a delay and we unfortunately didn't receive stock from our supplier until a few days later."

Amazon say they did email you on several occasions, Yijian, explaining the status of the order: "The email address we have been communicating with is the email address provided for the order and, as such, is different to Yijian's email – this might be why the customer hasn't seen our communications."

DACS ALL, FOLKS?

More grumbles from consumer land about BT's second line scheme after last month's complaints from various readers about the dreaded DACS: "We're having problems with our

second line, which offers only a very slow Internet connection," says reader James Connolly.

He also informed us that he used to work for BT: "People there used to sell DACS-based 'second lines' knowing that it would affect performance," says James. "Also, I know of occasions when BT has been challenged about DACS lines before without success. I would be impressed if BT voluntarily fixes this problem."

Over to BT, who has checked both your lines and established that neither are on DACS and they have no records of complaints from you either, James. "We are sorry to hear of his problems regarding his second line, but we have no record of him ever having contacted BT about this issue, and no record of any DACS unit on either of his lines," says the company.

As for your comments about BT's DACS policy, the company insists again that it listens to punter feedback: "Our policy with respect to DACS is to try to remove it from the line where customers advise us it is adversely affecting their Internet experience," underlines BT. "Residential customers simply need to call free on either 151 or 150 and we will raise an order to remove the DACS."

MOTHERBOARD MADNESS

"About three months ago, I bought an MSI 655 MAX-FISR motherboard from MSI," starts Grant Newman's techie complaint. "After reading the specifications on MSI's site, it said the motherboard supported HT [Hormone Treatment? – Ed] on 3GHz CPUs."

When Grant received the motherboard though, there was no HT, even though MSI said the board was 'HT Ready'. "Apparently, there are two versions of this motherboard under the same name; one with HT, the other without," explains Grant.

THE ACCUSED

amazon.co.uk

BT

MESH

MSI

SCAN

PIPEX

GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT

"Sure enough, my Radeon 9700 Pro was just the plain 9700 vanilla"

SAINTS NOT SINNERS

▲ COULD IT BE TRUE? A COMPANY THAT DOESN'T BELIEVE ITS CUSTOMERS SHOULD PAY FOR ITS MISTAKES? CALL GUINNESS!

Last month, we updated readers on how Jeff Dean had not been asked to cough up a backdated payment which he owed on his BT Openworld account – he was only being charged half price and was terrified he would end up with a bill from hell, despite his attempts to contact BT. Anyway, BT eventually did the right thing and said: "Forget about the backdated stuff – 'twas our fault."

In the meantime, Carl Goodworth got in touch to say that he had experienced a similar problem but was most impressed with the way Freeserve had handled it. He received the following from the company: "Sorry, we've made a mistake. We've been billing you incorrectly for your Freeserve Broadband service. The Freeserve Broadband service you signed up for costs £27.99 per month. However, you've been paying just £19.99 per month."

They went on to inform him that they "don't believe our customers should pay for our mistakes so we won't be asking for any money back. However, from next month, we'll be charging you the correct price of £27.99 a month."

Carl tells us that examination of his records revealed that the lower amount had been in place since January 2003. "So it just goes to show perhaps BT can learn a few lessons in expeditious customer relations!" he reckons...

Nursing a techno-babble hangover, we contacted MSI who told us: "We are sorry to hear that some of our customers have been confused by the different versions of the 655 Max board. Basically the problem here is that when SIS first released the 655 chipset, it was supposed to have HT support, but they did not manage to implement it correctly."

To cut a long (and dull) story short, they released a version that didn't support HT, but they managed to release one that did shortly afterwards. According to MSI, these differences were clearly stated on their website and on the box, but they do apologise for any confusion caused.

SCAN SCAM

It's never pleasant when you get that sinking feeling that a company is simply not listening to your problems. Take Rachel and Jason Young, who bought a PSU from Scan late last year. Two weeks ago, it stopped working: "We emailed the returns query department to get an RMA number so my husband could return it," explains Rachel. "Three days went by and Jason

Rachel and Jason Young's mental image of Scan's customer help phone service...



"Even if your area is broadband enabled, it doesn't mean your problems are over"

had not heard from Scan, so he emailed them again. Three days went by again and still nothing. He has now been emailing them every other day and they just ignore his request."

Jason then decided to phone Scan, but grew tired of waiting for customer services to pick up. So he hung up. "We are now at our wits' end with this despicable company and don't know what to do," says Rachel.

Sounds like a woeful and frustrating tale of customer service. So what does Scan have to say for itself? "We do apologise for the initial delay in our contacting them," they say. "We do aim to reply to all email queries within 24 hours. However, this is not always possible due to workload and increased demands."

They say they have finally issued you with an RMA number and the PSU has been replaced.

PIPING MAD!

Even if your area is broadband enabled, it doesn't mean your problems are over, as Steve Eccles found out when he tried to migrate from BT Openworld to Pipex. "After being connected for one week, I had my ADSL line disconnected and reported the fault to Pipex on July 16, 2003," he explains. "After many phone calls, my line was reconnected one week later."

So that was the end of that, even though he was never given any explanation for the

disconnection. "Just when things appeared to be OK, on September 10, 2003, the line was disconnected again," reveals Steve.

He continues: "I telephoned Pipex about the fault and again I was promised a phone call back – this never happened. I found myself talking to over four members of staff nine days later to try to resolve the matter, as the line was still disconnected."

Pipex, however, could still not offer any explanation and Steve eventually cancelled the service in frustration: "I am still awaiting any compensation or even one phone call from this company," fumes Steve.

The reasons behind this series of cock-ups is complicated – ultimately Pipex is laying the blame on the doorstep of BT Openworld and BT Wholesale who, Pipex claims, "failed to follow published procedure".

A spokesperson for the company told Watchdog: "Pipex deeply regrets the sequence of events that lead to this unfortunate outcome and we will be raising this issue with BT Wholesale as they have to adhere to several of their own procedures."

"Our own failure to contact Mr Eccles within an acceptable time frame will be addressed internally with the appropriate department."

Pipex should have been on the blower by now to offer you a refund on your final subscription payment. ☹

PNY TECHNOLOGIES

Ready to Evolve?



NEW!



GeForce FX™
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256MB DDR

GeForce FX™
5900 Ultra
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AGP8X

With a GeForce FX™ powering your graphics experience, you can run applications and games at higher resolutions and at speeds never before possible. Whether you're a bleeding-edge gamer who desires the most advanced gaming technology available, or a PC user in search of the perfect combination of power, performance and value, GeForce FX™ top-to-bottom solutions deliver.

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GAME

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www.game.uk.com/pny

PC WORLD
The Computer Superstore

www.pcworld.co.uk

BUYER'S GUIDE

Our in-depth guide to making your hardware buying decisions as easy as pulling in Tenerife

Gone are the three categories of old and in their place are three sensational newbies. Editor's Choice is the class champ, the product that will satisfy all of you, no matter what you play.

Our Recommended product wears a silver medal, not quite as triumphant as the outright winner, but a very worthy and cost-effective alternative. Finally, the Also Consider product is

one we believe you should look at before settling for one of the other two – it may just tickle your dipple.

If you feel we've got something wrong, or just want to add your

tuppence ha'penny, send an email to: letters@pczone.co.uk. If we act on any of your mind-blowing suggestions, we'll be certain to shower you with fabulous gifts. Promise.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

RECOMMENDED

ALSO CONSIDER

MOTHERBOARD



IS7-E (INTEL)

STREET PRICE £78

MANUFACTURER ABIT Computer

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.abit.com.tw

Huge performance coupled with a huge sigh of relief from your wallet. Although the IS7 uses Intel's Springdale chipset, essentially a restricted version of its Canterwood sibling, Abit's motherboard supports P4 800/533/400MHz CPUs with Hyper-Threading, and up to 4GB of Dual DDR. It also features onboard LAN, six-channel audio, and IEEE 1394 FireWire. Proof you don't need to spend over a ton for a top-rank motherboard.



K7N2 DELTA ILSR (ATHLON)

STREET PRICE £86.50

MANUFACTURER MSI

TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688

WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw

With the nForce2 chipset and the FSB wound up to 400MHz, the K7N2 Delta provides AMD die-hards with extra shove from a faster system bus and up to 3GB of Dual DDR memory. Although Barton-cored Athlons aren't a patch on their Hyper-Threaded opposite numbers, boards like the K7N2 Delta close the gap. Other features include dual IEEE 1394 FireWire and automated BIOS updates.



875PNEO-FIS2R (INTEL)

STREET PRICE £150

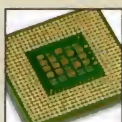
MANUFACTURER MSI

TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688

WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw

A high-end P4 Canterwood board, the Neo features some truly remarkable features, including dynamic overclocking – the hardware jumps on the throttle the moment you open applications – and automated BIOS updates using MSI's own Live Update software. Other features include IEEE 1394 FireWire, six-channel audio, onboard LAN and support for Dual DDR. Build quality and overall packaging are excellent.

PROCESSOR



P4 3.0GHZ

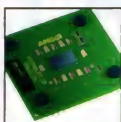
STREET PRICE £296

MANUFACTURER Intel

TELEPHONE 01793 403000

WEBSITE www.intel.com

For an additional £160, you could order the three-litre chip's big brother, the 3.2GHz, but we don't think the extra thrust justifies the price hike. With Hyper-Threading enabled, the 3.0GHz Pentium delivers a jaw-pounding power hit from twin processors and an 800MHz front-side bus. With a decent motherboard and some fast memory, products such as this make Doom 3 and Half-Life 2 seem all the more plausible.



ATHLON XP 3000+ BARTON

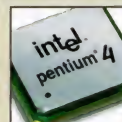
STREET PRICE £196

MANUFACTURER AMD

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.amd.com

Let's not forget who drove Intel into rolling out key features such as Hyper-Threading. AMD's Athlon successfully shocked its rival into releasing technologies that were originally pencilled for the next Pentium. And although any 3.0GHz HT on paper makes the Barton look like a distant runner-up, it remains a great chip at a great price. Paired with a decent video card, it's a high-quality solution.



P4 2.4GHZ

STREET PRICE £145

MANUFACTURER Intel

TELEPHONE 01793 403 000

WEBSITE www.intel.com

For little more than £200 you can have our Editor's Choice motherboard and a Hyper-Threading Pentium 4 chip running at 2.4GHz with 800MHz FSB. Drop in our favourite Radeon 9800 Pro video card, and instantly you have a balls-on machine that's ready and willing to tackle the next generation of gaming. If you're building a local games network and want big machines for small money, look no further.

HDD



WD1200JB 120GB

STREET PRICE £88.50

MANUFACTURER Western Digital

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

Many of you will view a 120GB HDD as an extravagance, but with games getting longer and broadband getting wider, a hangar-like hard drive gives you plenty of room for mucking about. You'll also bring that never-ending quest for more room to an abrupt end. The price is just right, and the performance second to none. Like the DiamondMax Plus9, the WD1200JB features an 8MB cache and a speed of 7200RPM.



DIAMONDMAX PLUS9 80GB

STREET PRICE £60

MANUFACTURER Maxtor

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.maxtor.com

The mid-sized Maxtor is for everyone: large, fast and not that expensive. Most users will find 80GB more than adequate for work, play and downloading requirements, and those greedy for more gig can jump a size up. The Fast ATA, 7200RPM drive includes Maxtor's Shock Protection System and Quiet Drive Technology, but for the Serial ATA version, expect a £20 premium.



RAPTOR 36GB

STREET PRICE £106

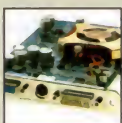
MANUFACTURER Western Digital

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

If you don't need a deep hole for your data, or if you intend keeping your dirt on a separate drive, the 10,000RPM Serial ATA Raptor makes the ideal foundation for your primary partition. It's wickedly fast, perhaps the fastest HDD available yet, and although designed for server environments, provides gaming desktops with the kind of warp-nine, low access times that make any application more nimble.

GRAPHICS CARD



128MB RADEON 9600 PRO

STREET PRICE: £122

MANUFACTURER: Gigabyte

TELEPHONE: 01908 362700

WEBSITE: uk.giga-byte.com

Although the 9600 Pro wins on power, the 9600 Pro is the value king. For less than half the cost of a big-ass Raddy, the 128MB midweight delivers an amazing punch that knocks its NVIDIA counterpart for six. Gigabyte's big bundle includes three top games, plus PowerDVD 5 and all the necessary cable whips. Sure, it's not the fastest, but for this money it goes beyond our expectations.



256MB V9950 ULTRA

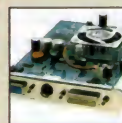
STREET PRICE: £380

MANUFACTURER: ASUS

TELEPHONE: 01908 518000

WEBSITE: www.asus.com

The FX 5900 Ultra finds it feet again with the release of the series 50 Detonator drivers – top-class Radeons will find themselves level pegging with the old GeForce. The one thing preventing this and other über-cards from hogging the Editor's Choice slot is their bad value – you don't get many frames per pound spent. That said, if you're after top resolution and quality gaming, look no further.



128MB RADEON 9200

STREET PRICE: £78

MANUFACTURER: Gigabyte

TELEPHONE: 01908 362700

WEBSITE: uk.giga-byte.com

It's one of the cheapest, but it ain't no slowpoke. Quicker and better value than entry-level GeForce cards, the 9200 is an admirable performer at low resolutions, and not too bad higher up. Sure, you're not going to be leaving flames in your tracks, but for budget money you shouldn't expect to. Gigabyte's tempting bundle includes a game, a copy of PowerDVD 5 and cable whips.

SOUND CARD



REVOLUTION 7.1

STREET PRICE £88

MANUFACTURER M-Audio

TELEPHONE 0871 717 7100

WEBSITE www.m-audio.co.uk

Although it lacks a few of its rivals' gamer-friendly features, including hardware DirectSound and a joystick/MIDI port, the Revolution more than makes up for any deficit with a truly astonishing quality of sound. Unique technologies enhance your enjoyment of games, music and movies. The software is straight-talking and boasts a familiar look and feel, making the card a delight to work with.



AUDIGY 2

STREET PRICE £75

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

A quantum leap from its predecessor, the Audigy 2 offers a boggling range of pro-gamer and DVD features, including 6.1 surround sound, EAX Advanced HD, Advanced Resolution DVD-Audio and 24-bit/96kHz recording – it was the first card to gain THX certification from LucasFilm. If you appreciate the immersive experience offered by high-fidelity surround sound, the Audigy will give you an experience like no other.



AUDIGY 2 PLATINUM EX

STREET PRICE £150

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Offering the same core features as its little brother, the Platinum Ex is guaranteed to perform and sound like no other card. The external breakout box is a boon for serious listeners, and includes standard audio connections and volume controls. The big Platinum also offers dual SB1394 FireWire ports and optical links, a stereo RCA input, plus MIDI In and MIDI Out mini-DIN sockets.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

RECOMMENDED

ALSO CONSIDER



MX500

STREET PRICE £34
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Although it comes with a tail and doesn't have the same substantive feeling as the battery-reliant MX700, the MX500 remains a solid product and a solid performer in all games. It features Logitech's MX optical engine, mouse wheel (plus two additional buttons either side to aide document navigation), a task-switcher button, and two thumb buttons that speed up web navigation.



OPTICAL MOUSE BLUE

STREET PRICE £20
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk

If you've ever been boggled by the number of buttons on a mouse, and have fond memories of a time when three clickers and a wheel were all you needed, Microsoft's blue rodent is the perfect peripheral. It's nice to look at, nice to hold and, as any veteran FPS gamer will tell you, three buttons is all you need. Plus the latest optical technology means it works anywhere.

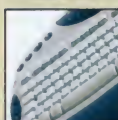


MX700

STREET PRICE £47
MANUFACTURER ACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Sporting the MX optical engine that made Logitech famous with gamers, the MX700 is essentially an MX500 with its tail lopped off. A cradle keeps your desk tidy and acts as a recharger for the unfettered rodent - making the mouse more attractive to people who don't do batteries. It's a touch pricey and we remain unconvinced that going cordless is worth the extra stash.

MICE



INTERNET NAVIGATOR

STREET PRICE £21
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

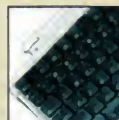
The Internet Navigator lies absolutely flat on your desk, a trademark Logitech design that makes it look sleeker and 'feel' nicer. There's a scroll wheel along the left edge and a raft of customisable function keys to make trawling the web a cinch - you no longer have to swap back and forth to the mouse, and instead can leave your hands over on the keyboard. Once you browse this way, there's no going back.



OFFICE KEYBOARD

STREET PRICE £28
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk

Forget what you've learned about Microsoft software - their hardware is always of an exceedingly high build quality and, despite problems with early Intellimouse rodents, extremely durable. Shortcut buttons you think you'll never use soon become second nature, especially when reconfigured to suit your way of working, and once you learn the enhanced layout you'll never go back to tapping on anything else.



PRO KEYBOARD

STREET PRICE £50
MANUFACTURER Apple
TELEPHONE 0800 039 1010
WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk

If you think we're mad for including an Apple keyboard, think again. Anyone looking for a Rolls-Royce keyboard, and who can live without all the additional buttons, scroll wheels and assorted paraphernalia, need look no further. The Apple Pro plugs straight into your USB port and, with the help of third-party utilities, disguises the fact that it was designed for computer illiterates with fewer than two mouse buttons.

KEYBOARD



CYBORG EVO

STREET PRICE £28.50
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.co.uk

A welcome new look for Saitek, and the welcome addition of a four-way adjustable head, larger buttons, plus a meaty damped throttle at the back of the base. As with all Cyborgs, the sculpted hand-rests can be repositioned ambidextrously and will suit all hand sizes. An eight-way hat switch, five thumb buttons with trigger, four base buttons and a shift key to double the possible combinations make this a winner.



CYBORG 3D GOLD

STREET PRICE £24.99
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451 900
WEBSITE www.saitek.co.uk

A former Best Buy, the Saitek stick is renowned for the way it can be taken apart and put back together to fit your hand perfectly, and also for its ambidextrous nature - lefties as well as righties can get to grips with it. It features seven fire buttons and, like the Sidewinder, has eight hat buttons, a lever throttle and a twist grip for controlling the rudder. At this price you'd be daft not to.



HOTAS COUGAR

STREET PRICE £249
MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster
TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881
WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.co.uk

The John Holmes of joysticks. Based on the flight controls of an F-16, sturdy metal construction makes it feel like no other peripheral. With 28 customisable buttons, 18lbs of resistance built into its springs, programmable hat switches and an adaptive action for the separate throttle arm, it transforms any flight simulation and is the ultimate toy for wannabe pilots. It's ten times the cost of a regular joystick, but is in a class of its own.

JOYSTICK



INSPIRE 5.1 5300

STREET PRICE £50
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

The Inspire furnishes you with five satellite speakers, a sub and a wired remote control. All are sleek looking, solid feeling and great sounding. The bass is clean, the middle and treble crisp, and although power output doesn't climb into three digits, the amp provides more than enough oomph. Added to which, there's support for enhanced 5.1 surround sound on EAX titles. The only downside is that there's no headphone jack.



Z-640

STREET PRICE £70
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Logitech has patented the pressure-driver design of its subwoofer and we can hear the difference. For the money, the clout is simply amazing - bassheads among you will love it. Higher frequencies don't disappoint either, the 5.1 sounding almost as clean and inviting as the Inspire 5300s. Unlike the Creative set, the Z-640 has a headphone socket, but it's not conveniently sited. Shame.



MEGAWORKS THX 5.1 550

STREET PRICE £235
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Successor to our Best Performance winner, the Megaworks 550 is a pretty stunning 5.1 setup featuring five 70W capsule-shielded satellite speakers, a 150W wood subwoofer, and a wired remote with a separate headphone socket. Built to THX standards the sound quality is superb in both DVDs and games - Creative's BASH system providing 500W of burst power that'll make you leap out of your seat.

SPEAKERS



CML174SXW

STREET PRICE £330
MANUFACTURER Hitachi
TELEPHONE 01628 585000
WEBSITE www.hitachidigitalmedia.com

When it comes to flat panel, fast-paced gaming, response times really count. And the CML174SXW has one of the lowest response times in its sector - a mere 16ms. It also delivers top-notch image quality, weighs in at just 5kg, and comes in colours that'll match your kit. If you're looking to make the move from CRT, and action games are a priority for you, the handsome little Hitachi is the obvious choice.



FLATRON L1710B

STREET PRICE £345
MANUFACTURER LG Electronics
TELEPHONE 01753 491500
WEBSITE www.lge.co.uk

This 17-inch panel came within a gnat's guff of knocking our Hitachi favourite from the top spot, but its slightly fatter price tag (from the addition of a USB hub), plus inconspicuous silver and grey trim saw the L1710B lose out. But don't think it's a distant second place - things are as close as a kiss, the LG offering marginally better picture quality and matching the Hitachi for speed. Yet another nail in the CRT coffin.



VISIONMASTER PRO 514

STREET PRICE £490
MANUFACTURER Iiyama
TELEPHONE 01438 745 482
WEBSITE www.iiyama.co.uk

Boasting a 22in Mitsubishi Electric DIAMONDTRON tube, 0.24 mm AG pitch and flicker-free refresh rates at immense resolutions, the Iiyama is a truly breathtaking sight on your desktop - not least because it gobbles so much of it. The big VM also features a typically comprehensive on-screen menu, USB hub and audio connectors. At 1600x1200, the display is rock steady at 110Hz and is ideal partner for gaming.

SCREENS



APPLE IPOD 40GB

STREET PRICE £409
MANUFACTURER Apple
TELEPHONE 020 8210 1000
WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk

There are loads of MP3 players on the market but everybody wants an iPod and the new version is even smaller (in size) yet bigger (in capacity). It weighs less than two CDs and can store up to 7,500 tracks, and as a bonus the supplied headphones are top notch as well. The speedy Firewire interface (you'll need a suitable connection) and remote control rounds off a totally class act.



ARCHOS JUKEBOX MULTIMEDIA

STREET PRICE £299
MANUFACTURER Archos
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.archos.com

While it may never win any awards for aesthetics, the Jukebox Multimedia from Archos is the Swiss Army Knife of media players. Handling one of the widest selections of file types, the player can even play back a selection of video formats including DIVX. The sound is fantastic, but the bundled headphones are shite. And it's cheaper than the mighty iPod.



MUVO

STREET PRICE £60
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.europe.creative.com

The MuVo is one of the smartest gadgets we've seen. It comes in two parts, a USB key that plugs into any system running XP (without drivers), and a battery housing. Plug it into your PC and you can back up your documents. Drag a few MP3s onto the drive and when you snap the two halves together and plug in some headphones you've got one of the smallest MP3 players on the market.

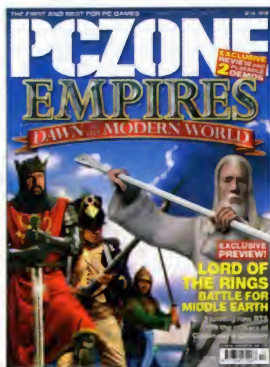
MP3 PLAYER



MAILBOX

Feeling grumpy? Something to get off your chest? Off-load here – we promise we'll listen

■ KEEPING IT REAL Dave Woods



GOAL!

I was watching the footy on Sky Sports on Saturday afternoon when Jamie Sefton popped up commentating on some obscure match in the second division. At least I thought it was Jamie Sefton, but they kept referring to him as Chris Kamara. I've enclosed a picture – could you clear up the mystery for me as I'm thoroughly confused by the whole thing.

Peter Faraday

Unfortunately we've been unable to verify your claim. It certainly looks like Jamie, and after checking him out on Saturday afternoon it definitely sounds like Jamie. We tried phoning him on air



Who are you calling short?

MILD-MANNERED REPORTER EXPOSED



Angry Northerner: Chris.



Angry Northerner: Jamie.

but he didn't answer his phone. One thing's for sure, they've never been seen in the same room together.

NEWSROUND

You claim that your scoring system is harsh, with an average being a strict 50 per cent, but where is your scientific proof? Now call me sad but I thought you ought to know the truth.

In issue 134 you reviewed 27 games, awarding a total of 1,764 per cent. Now this works out at 65.33 per cent per game. Only eight games actually scored 50 per cent or less. Now you could quibble about my data collection strategy – is one issue a valid statistical sample? Or perhaps you could argue that it was an exceptional month for games? Or that my maths is shit. However, as there were no classics in the issue I reckon it's about right.

So if an average score is 65 per cent, I don't think you're harsh enough. I think you need to take drastic action to get your average down – I suggest awarding zero per cent scores for all *Sims* expansion packs as a good starting point.

John Craven

Normally we'd belittle anyone making such a claim, but when it comes from a legend and childhood hero you have to sit up and take notice. *Sims* beware. (Although, you're shit at maths – I've got it down as 61.2 per cent.)

SHORTARSE

Is it me or are games getting shorter? The first game I remember completing within Game's 10-day 'no quibble' return policy window was *Max Payne*. Since then I've finished *Unreal II* (one week), *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* (one day), *Splinter Cell* (one weekend) and, more recently, *Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy* (one day). I also

finished half of *Republic: The Revolution* in half a day and then gave up.

I've been playing computer games for a long time, but I play online and I'm definitely not a top player. I do enjoy a good story-based game though, and these games were all enjoyable to play, they were just over far too quickly. To make matters worse, most of them didn't even have a multiplayer mode to extend their life.

It's this trend of decreasing game content that fills me with concern for *Doom 3*, *Half Life 2* and *Deus Ex: Invisible War*. They may be fantastic gaming experiences, but will they be lasting ones? We can only wait and see...

Lawrence Duru

Some games are getting shorter, especially the shooters. Of course, you could always buy *Morrowind* if you want a game that goes on... and on... and on...

CS 4 EVR

The new Online Zone is a good addition to the mag, but why have you dropped *Counter-Strike* from the Reader's Free For All? I know you have to move

GOT SOMETHING YOU NEED TO GET OFF YOUR CHEST? WRITE TO...

MAILBOX, PC ZONE, 30 CLEVELAND ST, LONDON W1T 4JD, OR EMAIL LETTERS@PCZONE.CO.UK

WIN!
A TOP
SOUND
CARD

■ The Letter of the Month wins a spanking new soundcard courtesy of the lovely people at Creative Labs. The Audigy 2 ZS soundcard supports surround sound up to 7.1 channels and offers the best all-round gaming performance. We just hope you have deaf neighbours.



"To play *Half-Life 2* you'll have to use your brain – a developer has finally come to the conclusion that we can think for ourselves"

MATT DAVIDSON TELLS IT LIKE IT IS

forward, but dropping the most popular online game in the world is a huge mistake. Take notice of your public because we can make or break you. We play *Counter-Strike* and we all love *Counter-Strike* so stop being a pain in the arse and restore it to where it belongs as the head boy in Online Zone. We, the people, have spoken.

PS Have you tried *Halo* online? It's truly amazing; *Counter-Strike* is going to lose its crown.

Steve Mills

Prezzer says: "*Counter-Strike* is, was and forever shall be the



Counter-Strike: not the only game in the world.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

BRAIN STRAIN

The other day I got a new DVD player and decided to try out your DVD, saving *Half-Life 2* until last. Damn, I nearly wet myself with excitement. I have never seen anything that comes as close to reality as that. Virtually everything can be moved in one way or another, just like in real life. And that's the problem...

To play *Half-Life 2*, you'll actually have to use your brain. That means a developer has finally come to the conclusion that we, the game-playing public, are capable of thinking for ourselves. How will we be expected to know where to go if there is no corridor to move through? What if there are no switches that change colour or appearance when you look at them? How will we solve the puzzles? Free thinking scares us.

Seriously though, after playing *Half-Life 2*, will we ever want to go back to a mindless 'if it moves, kill it' type of game? Could this be the end of corridor gaming as we know it? I somehow doubt it but we, the game playing public, could vote with our money. We don't have to buy the games that treat us like simpletons, do we? Only buy what challenges you, then that will be all the publishers will sell – they will be forced to produce intelligent games.

Matt Davidson



Think? For ourselves? You've got to be kidding.

And thanks to the mindless cretin that stole the code from Valve, we've now got to wait even longer to get our hands on the game. Check out our lead news story for the full skinny (page 10) and keep your fingers crossed that he's rotting in jail by the time you're reading this.

King Of All Online Gaming (In A Round-Based Team Shooting Type Environment), of that there can be no dispute. But just as with King Charles I, King Kong and, er, Jonathan King, there comes a time when every oppressive reigning force must be marched upon by the unruly masses and beheaded for the good of mankind. To focus our gaming efforts purely upon the one title would be to deny the wonderfulness on offer in more modern titles.

"We must move with the times, my children. Sample all the succulent meats in our online gaming stew. Besides, we're all shit at *Counter-Strike*."

TRY BEFORE YOU BUY

I get very frustrated when a new game comes out because there's hardly ever a playable demo released with it. These publishers obviously have something to hide or they would release something beforehand to show how great their game really is.

Releasing a demo could also reduce piracy because it would give people a chance to try the game out without downloading an illegal version from the Internet. I realise developers can't release an alpha to the public, but with games such as *Half-Life 2*, which is apparently "90 per cent complete", surely a demo could be released? If it contained enough material

BACKCHAT

▲ THE BEST OF THE CHAT FROM THE PCZONE FORUM THIS MONTH. GET CONTROVERSIAL AT WWW.PCZONE.CO.UK

Backchat recently discovered *Jesus Freakin'*, an unusually blasphemous FPS that turned out to be a hoax (check it out at www.jesuskfreakin.com), and thought it was about time to ask you what you thought about controversial games. Do you want more blood, more sex, more drink, drugs and rock'n'roll, and games with a healthy disregard for everything society holds dear to its moralistic heart? Or do you want *The Sims*?

Darrenmdr wasted no time sticking his oar in: "Controversy is often used to mask a piss-poor game – *Hooligans*, *Postal*, etc. I was put off *Postal 2* because it sounded like a case of 'oooh we're being really naughty', so I thought the game would be crap. From what I've heard it is actually quite good."

RaTang was more forthright: "*Postal 2* is an average game, but the violence and gore makes up for it. There's something about setting ppl alight, watching them burn and then kicking their charred bodies halfway across town that I find very satisfying." The police have been informed.

The Seed came up with a concept for a new game that's got potential: *Computer Games Journalist Hunter*. It's "an exciting new worldwide trek that sees you, the player, hunt down and slaughter games journalists in over 60 countries around the world". Backchat predicts a classic rating of 97 per cent, and is already at work on the add-on pack, *Freelance Hunter: The Search For Steve Hill's Copy*.

Meanwhile, **Da_houecat** writes: "Controversy is in the eye of the beholder. If I can set someone on fire, piss on them to put them out and then chop their heads off, it's not controversial as it's only a game. People who find games offensive should accept that not everyone shares their beliefs and steer clear if they know they won't like it."



"Now do you believe?"

But what about religion, purred **Bagsabbis**? "A game showing religious characters in an amusing or controversial setting could really upset people. Salman Rushdie had to go into hiding after writing *The Satanic Verses* – can you imagine a religious community gunning for a games developer?"

g_man_007 scribbled pages on the subject so we thought it fair to give him the last word. "Sensationalism is what sells; lest we forget about *ZONE* being asked by an enterprising hack if *Microsoft Flight Simulator* could have been used to test-pilot an attack approach on the World Trade Centre. I put it to you: controversy over computer games is not only in the eye of the beholder, it is also drummed up on a regular basis by the media, no matter how tenuous the link to the event. Yes, computer games can be controversial – just look at the link to *Jesus Freakin'* – but no more controversial than any book or film. And god forbid the UK ends up with censorship like Germany and Australia; if it does, the Mary Whitehouse Brigade can prise my violent games collection from my cold, yet somehow sweaty, dead grip." Well said that man.

(eg single and multiplayer content) there'd be no excuse for loading up a P2P program, and downloading the game to 'try it out'.

Sam Howe

We're always pushing for demos around the time of release, but unfortunately it's not as simple as that.

Developers work to extremely tight deadlines and if they push people across to making a demo then the game's release could well be delayed. In an ideal world, the demos would be factored into development time, and I agree that it's the best way to hype a great game. [22]

THE PCZONE A-LIST

◀ SHOOTERS ▶

MEDAL OF HONOR



They say the line between films and games is blurring, and after you've clawed your way through the maelstrom of the Omaha beach landings here, you'll have forgotten on which side you're standing. It may not be the best-looking shooter around, but for sheer immersion and intensity you can't beat the brilliant level design, the challenging AI, the lavish period detail and those beautifully scripted set-pieces.

PUB EA DEV 2015

PCZ ISSUE 112



NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2

Style, stealth and magnificent set-pieces are the order of the day in this excellent spy sequel. It looks brilliant, it's well designed and genuinely funny – and it doesn't treat you like an idiot.

PUB Black Label Games DEV Monolith

PCZ ISSUE 122



HALF-LIFE: GENERATIONS

Unchallenged for three years, *Half-Life* redefined its genre with a cracking atmosphere and a compelling plot. It now comes bundled with the excellent *Opposing Force* add-on pack and the world's favourite mod, *Counter-Strike*.

PUB Vivendi DEV Valve Software

PCZ ISSUE 71



HALO

NEW ENTRY After two years, the Xbox masterpiece has come home to the PC. It may be visually long in the tooth, but its exceptional multiplayer mayhem, superb vehicles and solid solo missions puts it squarely in our hall of fame.

PUB Microsoft DEV Bungie/Gearbox

PCZ ISSUE 135



JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY

The latest saber-em-up from the Lucas stable is an absolute winner; think fights with Boba Fett, double-ended light sabers, customisable characters and even the opportunity to turn to the Dark Side. Ace.

PUB Activision DEV Raven

PCZ ISSUE 133



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003

Not a million miles away from the last *UT* title, *UT2003* does however make leaps and bounds graphically. With finely balanced weapons, smart bots and diverse maps it's the reigning king of speed fragging.

PUB Atari DEV Digital Extremes

PCZ ISSUE 122



UNREAL II

In terms of visuals, this is the absolute pinnacle in the world of the FPS. What's more, the arsenal of weaponry at your disposal is imaginative and satisfying to wield, while the sound effects, music and voice acting all exude quality too.

PUB Atari DEV Legend Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 126



MAFIA

From the makers of *Hidden & Dangerous* and just as compelling, this game borrows from every great gangster film ever made. Tense missions, superb atmosphere and great AI – it's a classic in every respect. Badabing!

PUB Take 2 DEV Illusion

PCZ ISSUE 119



SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II

The bloodiest shooter in the world is back, but this time there's a brilliant game covering beneath the carnage. Sublime AI is the chief culprit and if you can stomach the violence this is a must buy.

PUB Activision DEV Raven

PCZ ISSUE 118



BATTLEFIELD 1942

Even though it features a disappointing and heavily bugged single-player campaign, *Battlefield* is one of the most compelling team-based multiplayer games ever. A must-have for any online shooter fan.

PUB EA DEV Digital Illusions

PCZ ISSUE 121

◀ STRATEGY ▶

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR



A sequel to the stunning *Shogun: Total War* (now available on budget), *Medieval* offers everything its predecessor did and a whole lot more.

Adding to the massive 3D battles and turn-based *Risk*-style strategy map are a multitude of new options, both diplomatic and military. Breathtaking in every way, strategy games just don't come any better than this.

PUB Activision

DEV Creative Assembly

PCZ ISSUE 120



RISE OF NATIONS

One of the most addictive and satisfying strategy games to land on our desks in ages. Its unique perspective, great gameplay and all-round freshness make *Rise Of Nations* a title worthy of our prestigious Classic award.

PUB Microsoft DEV Big Huge Games

PCZ ISSUE 129



AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

The *Age Of* series goes 3D in Ensemble Studios' best strategy outing to date. Great gameplay, superb attention to detail and a strong storyline give this an unparalleled sense of atmosphere, plus it includes a decent map editor.

PUB Microsoft DEV Ensemble Studios

PCZ ISSUE 123



REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION

This highly original take on the machinations of political upheaval in Eastern Europe has split gaming opinion down the middle, but we think it's a fascinating, educating and unique piece of gaming history.

PUB Eidos Interactive DEV Elixir Studios

PCZ ISSUE 132



WARRIOR KINGS: BATTLES

Warrior Kings was one of the most compelling and diverse RTS games we'd seen. This second chapter, which focuses around skirmish play, offers more units, varied tech trees and challenging AI generals.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Black Cactus

PCZ ISSUE 128

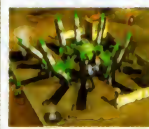


EMPIRES: DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD

NEW ENTRY The latest to fall off the *Age Of Empires* lorry may not innovate but there's a good variety of nations with accurate historical spins (General Patton, Richard the Lionheart etc), novel unit types and well-written campaigns.

PUB Activision DEV Stainless Steel Studios

PCZ ISSUE 135



COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS

The C&C series comes of age in this 3D orgy of scud missiles, daisy-cutter bombs and nuclear strikes. *Generals* is a superb-looking game with well-designed sides that offers fun in spades.

PUB EA DEV EA Pacific/Westwood

PCZ ISSUE 127



COMMANDOS 2

There have been a few imitators of the squad-based strategy of *Commandos* but none have come close to this sequel. If, like us, you loved the first game, you'll love this massive, preposterously detailed follow-up even more.

PUB Eidos DEV Pyro Studio

PCZ ISSUE 108



HOMEWORLD 2

The interface to this epic space combat RTS might be a bit intimidating for rookies, but *Homeworld 2* definitely deserves a place in our hall of fame. Staggering visuals and gripping strategic manoeuvring make it addictive.

PUB VU Games DEV Relic

PCZ ISSUE 134



WARCRAFT III

While not a huge departure from the original, *Warcraft III* is an extremely enjoyable and polished package. The storyline is brilliant and the multiplayer action dangerously addictive. Simple, solid entertainment.

PUB VU Games DEV Blizzard

PCZ ISSUE 119

Welcome to the **PC ZONE A-List**, the definitive buyer's guide for all discerning PC gamers. The games that grace these pages aren't just good, they're the best of the best in their respective genres, and our list is continually updated to show how each game stands in relation to its peers

ROLE-PLAYING GAMES ▶

DEUS EX



Warren Spector is one of the true visionaries of the computer game medium, and this is his magnum opus. Combining the finer elements of *Half-Life*, *System Shock 2* and *Thief*, *Deus Ex* is an RPG of complex beauty and a true revolution in computer gaming. The fascinating sci-fi plot and amazing attention to detail, combined with unparalleled player freedom, are just some of the reasons why *Deus Ex* is a landmark in gaming.

PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 93

◀ ACTION/ADVENTURE ▶

SPLINTER CELL



At long last we've got a new king of the action adventures with the Tom Clancy-influenced *Splinter Cell*, and a new crown prince of stealth in the form of the über-flexible Sam Fisher. *Splinter Cell* features the perfect blend of action, structure and pace, combined with some of the best visuals and set pieces around. No self-respecting gamer should miss out on this.

PUB Ubisoft
DEV Ubisoft Montreal
PCZ ISSUE 125



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

One of the most impressive RPGs we've seen in years. A massively open-ended world full of beautiful visuals, superb depth of gameplay and innovative character development make this a classic that will keep you totally absorbed.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Bethesda Softworks
PCZ ISSUE 117



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

The makers of the epic *Baldur's Gate* series prove they are still a leading force in the world of RPGs with this glorious hardcore 3D adventure. It features great single and multiplayer options, along with a very accessible toolkit.

PUB Atari DEV Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 118



PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

An incredible game from Black Isle, using the *Baldur's Gate* engine. With a compelling story, well-scripted dialogue and the best character development we've seen in any game of its kind, this is a dark, adult scorching of an RPG.

PUB Interplay DEV Black Isle Studio
PCZ ISSUE 87



DUNGEON SIEGE

Graphically brilliant, massively enjoyable and highly immersive, *Dungeon Siege* is one of the best RPGs to date and only misses out on a Classic because of the shortcomings in the narrative.

PUB Microsoft DEV Gas Powered Games
PCZ ISSUE 115



SYSTEM SHOCK 2

Definitely one of the most original and disturbing games to hit the PC, *System Shock 2* manages to successfully mix the genres of role-playing, action and adventure into one. Play it with the lights off if you're hard enough.

PUB EA DEV Irrational Games
PCZ ISSUE 80



BALDUR'S GATE II

The original *Baldur's Gate* was hailed as one of the best story-driven role-playing games ever. The sequel isn't vastly different, but it's bigger, better and still extremely addictive. An essential for anyone interested in PC role-playing.

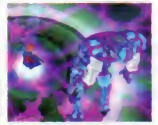
PUB Interplay DEV Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 96



DIVINE DIVINITY

This epic RPG contains the action of *Diablo II* combined with the storyline of the *Baldur's Gate* series, not to mention about 200 hours of gameplay in a huge fantasy world. The name may be a bit silly, but the gameplay certainly isn't.

PUB CDV DEV Larian Studios
PCZ ISSUE 121



FREEDOM FORCE

Control your own group of superheroes in this immersive and fully destructible comic book world. It may not be the most sophisticated and beasty of RPGs, but *Freedom Force* is unadulterated bubble-gum fun at its best.

PUB EA DEV Irrational Games
PCZ ISSUE 115



GOTHIC II

If you're willing to dedicate some time to it, this vast RPG is worth your pennies. Its sweeping landscapes are a delight to explore. It takes a while to get going, but the incredible level of immersion more than makes up for it.

PUB Atari DEV Piranha Bytes
PCZ ISSUE 132



GRIM FANDANGO

If you've followed LucasArts from the early days of *Monkey Island*, *Sam & Max* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, this is a must. The scripting is impeccable, while sublime graphics and brilliant humour ensure it's top of its genre.

PUB Activision DEV LucasArts
PCZ ISSUE 71



SILENT HILL 2: DIRECTOR'S CUT

Survival horror games have truly come of age with this superbly creepy and atmospheric offering. The (near identical) third game is also out, but for our money this is still the champ. Classy and disturbing.

PUB Konami DEV Konami
PCZ ISSUE 126



METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SUBSTANCE

A convincing PC conversion that adds tanker-loads of side-missions, training stages and unlockable characters to the PS2 original. There's too much waffle, but it's still an excellent third-person sneakfest.

PUB Konami DEV Konami
PCZ ISSUE 127



SOUL REAVER 2

While this latest episode in the saga of Raziel takes few risks with the action/adventure formula, it's a consummately constructed example of the genre, with a compelling storyline, satisfying combat and excellent puzzle dynamics.

PUB Eidos DEV Crystal Dynamics
PCZ ISSUE 111



DISCWORD NOIR

Although the point-and-click adventure game is dying, *Discworld Noir* is still very much alive. It's darker in style than previous *Discworld* games and all the better for it in our opinion.

PUB Atari DEV Perfect Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 79



THE THING

Drawing on some brilliant raw material from John Carpenter's classic horror movie, this survival action horror picks up the story where the film left off. It's one of the best film spin-offs around, with tense atmosphere and good gameplay.

PUB Black Label Games DEV Computer Artworks
PCZ ISSUE 121



PRISONER OF WAR

One of the most original games available with a light-hearted setting and an atmospheric soundtrack, which makes it more of an adventure than an action title. *POW* makes a refreshing change from the usual mass slaughter fare.

PUB Codemasters DEV Wide Games
PCZ ISSUE 121



HITMAN 2: SILENT ASSASSIN

The revamped *Hitman* engine is nothing short of breathtaking, blessing the sequel with gorgeous graphics that fit well with the refined controls and superb AI. *Hitman 2* is solid and enjoyable with a great sense of gameplay freedom.

PUB Eidos DEV IO
PCZ ISSUE 121



ENTER THE MATRIX

It may be console-oriented, its graphics may be dated and *Reloaded* could've been better, but it's still *The Matrix* through and through. It features excellent FMVs and great Bullet-Time kung fu moments.

PUB Atari DEV Shiny Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 130

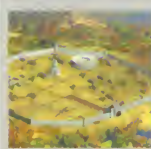
◀ GOD GAMES ▶

BLACK & WHITE



Although it had its critics, we still stand by our original verdict. Peter Molyneux's vision is pure and the design of the game both breaks boundaries and serves as a blueprint for the future. The add-on *Creature Isle* is also available, which cuts down on micro-management and lets you guide your creature through a variety of mini-games. Overall we think it's pure genius in a box.

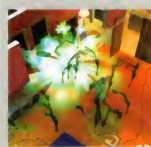
PUB EA **DEV** Lionhead Studios
PCZ ISSUE 100



CIVILIZATION III

Civilization III sticks to the same compulsive gameplay that made the first two games so popular. Die-hard *Civ* fans will relish the improved visuals and animation, while the new user-friendly interface makes the game accessible to the first-timer. Brings to mind the maxim 'if it ain't broke...'

PUB Atari **DEV** Firaxis Games
PCZ ISSUE 111



GHOST MASTER

Take your team of ghosts into the town of Gravenville and solve some otherworldly problems, scare a few mortals and bag yourself some new team mates in this innovative spook 'em up that's one of the freshest and funniest games we've seen for a long time.

PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Sick Puppies
PCZ ISSUE 130



THE SIMS

Revolutionary at birth, the concept has since been diluted through numerous add-ons and an unhealthy long stay in the charts. It's now little more than a cash cow for Electronic Arts, although you can't help but admire the strength of community and the fact that it's still selling by the bucket-load.

PUB EA **DEV** Maxis/EA
PCZ ISSUE 87



VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG

NEW ENTRY An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself, *Make It Big* provides hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that let you suck the money out of punters' pockets. It can get a little too fiddly, but it looks and plays really well. A *PC ZONE* 'Essential'.

PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Deep Red
PCZ ISSUE 135



CAESAR III

Starting from scratch, you've got to build a majestic Roman city and ensure a harmonious life for your citizens by balancing their work, health and entertainment needs. So what? So it's probably one of the most utterly absorbing and addictive god sims in existence. Hail *Caesar*.

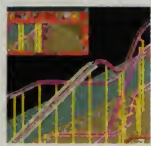
PUB VJ Games **DEV** Impressions
PCZ ISSUE 70



EMPEROR: RISE OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

This intricate game comes from the same stable as *Zeus* and *Caesar* – and they know a thing or two about city building. There's a massive amount of gameplay and more than 50 missions spanning seven historic campaigns. As well as the economic considerations, you'll have to follow feng shui and the Chinese zodiac.

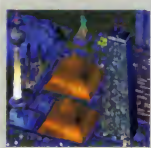
PUB VJ Games **DEV** Breakaway Games
PCZ ISSUE 121



ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2

As utterly absorbing as its predecessor, *RollerCoaster Tycoon 2* once again revolves around designing and managing your own theme park. This version also allows you to design individual rides, and includes a handful of real-life coasters. Detailed and addictive.

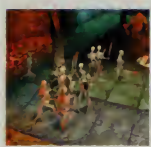
PUB Atari **DEV** Chris Sawyer
PCZ ISSUE 123



SIMCITY 4

The latest outing of the best-selling city-building sim goes 3D. Unfortunately there are no huge leaps forwards in gameplay, but there are plenty of features, such as regional cities, imported characters from *The Sims* and a terrain editor to keep you occupied.

PUB EA **DEV** Maxis
PCZ ISSUE 125



DUNGEON KEEPER 2

The ultimate 'it's good to be bad' game, *Dungeon Keeper* was a great idea and *DK2* takes the essence and humour of the original, corrects all the mistakes, vastly improves the graphics, and adds a myriad of new features that build wisely on the original concept.

PUB EA **DEV** Bullfrog
PCZ ISSUE 79

◀ SPACE COMBAT ▶

FREELANCER



The first game in years to actually make an effort to refine the space simulation genre, even if it doesn't manage to radically re-shape it. *Freelancer* combines the epic open-endedness of the classic *Elite* world with the combat immediacy of the *Wing Commander* series. It also mixes in a well-played out (if somewhat short) story and gorgeous graphics to create a thoroughly engaging and very atmospheric experience.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Digital Anvil

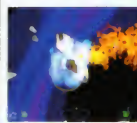
PCZ ISSUE 128



X - GOLD

The spirit of *Elite* lives on in this massive trading epic, in which you must buy and fight your way back home to Earth. It rewards patience with variety and months of absorbing gameplay. Deeply hypnotic and beautiful rather than tense and frenetic.

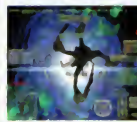
PUB THQ **DEV** Egosoft
PCZ ISSUE 82



TERMINUS

Who says the days of bedroom programming are over? *Terminus* proves you can make a great game on your own if you have the talent and passion, and we reckon it just edges out the mighty *FreeSpace 2*.

PUB www.macgames.co.uk **DEV** Vicarious Visions
PCZ ISSUE 93



Freespace 2

Following in the footsteps of *Wing Commander* and *X-Wing*, *FreeSpace 2* offers fast-paced dogfighting action all the way. With an epic story and amazing graphics, it suffers from being a bit short-lived if you don't play online.

PUB Interplay **DEV** Volition Inc
PCZ ISSUE 84



EDGE OF CHAOS: INDEPENDENCE WAR 2

This title is likely to appeal more to the die-hard space simmers, but *Edge of Chaos* still goes some way towards advancing the genre. Its graphics and absorbing freeform gameplay are inspirational.

PUB Atari **DEV** Particle Systems
PCZ ISSUE 104

◀ MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ▶

EVERQUEST



EverQuest keeps going from strength to strength and now has a total of five expansion packs. One of the best of these, *Planes Of Power*, provides a multitude of simplifications to help newcomers, while adding lots of new worlds for high-level characters to explore. It's a truly beautiful and captivating game that has claimed the souls and social lives of thousands of people the world over.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Sony Online Entertainment

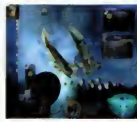
PCZ ISSUE 117



PLANETSIDE

Truly the mother of online battles, *Planetside* is a never-ending war among three armies and waged across several continents. Superb squad battles, stunning vehicles and atmospheric visuals make for a remarkably immersive experience.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Sony Online Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 131



EVE ONLINE

Eve Online is as beautiful as it is complex, oozing style from every pixel. Choose from four unique races and explore the *Eve* universe with its unparalleled scope for adventure, interaction and trade.

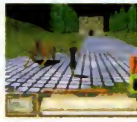
PUB Crucial **DEV** CCP
PCZ ISSUE 130



ANARCHY ONLINE

A beautiful MMOG with detailed environments and a huge selection of armour and weapons, which all add up to make an immersive title. Many of the bugs have been ironed out and the latest update offers a slick gaming experience.

PUB Funcom **DEV** Funcom
PCZ ISSUE 114



A TALE IN THE DESERT

No guns, no death, just the peaceful rolling dunes of ancient Egypt. This bizarre, yet beautiful MMOG sees you attempting to build a utopian society, farming camels and progressing through the seven tests of man.

PUB eGenesis **DEV** eGenesis
PCZ ISSUE 133

MULTIPLAYER MODS

COUNTER-STRIKE (HALF-LIFE)



Despite the slightly lame single-player release, it seems that *Counter-Strike* will always be the mod that rules the Earth. The popularity of this terrorist versus counter-terrorist mod shows no sign of abating, and there are few PC gamers who don't have a mental map of the troublespots of de_dust. At one point there were more CS servers than every other online game put together, and it isn't going to leave us any time soon.

WEB www.counter-strike.net

DESERT COMBAT (BF 1942)



This *Battlefield 1942* TC focuses on desert-based conflicts from the last decade, playing through scraps like the original Desert Storm and the troubles in Somalia. It's extraordinarily popular, and really rather good.

WEB www.desertcombat.com

NATURAL SELECTION (HALF-LIFE)



This superb *Half-Life* mod sees marines squaring off against the aliens in various sci-fi environments. With the marines working in teams and the aliens acting like mentalists, the variety in gameplay makes this a sure-fire winner.

WEB www.natural-selection.org

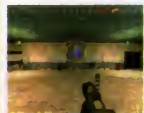
DAY OF DEFEAT (HALF-LIFE)



This atmospheric, highly realistic and superbly designed *Half-Life* mod covers various battles from deep within WWI. Its different character classes and superb arsenal of weapons add to authenticity, fun and general carnage.

WEB www.dayofdefeatmod.com

TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC (HALF-LIFE)



A great *Half-Life* squad-based action game with nine classes, a wide variety of weaponry and many map variations. The action focuses on infiltrating enemy bases, and the frantic gameplay requires more manual dexterity than most.

WEB www.planetfortress.com/tfc

3D ACTION / STRATEGY

OPERATION FLASHPOINT GOLD

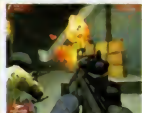


Now available with the tricky *Red Hammer* add-on, *Flashpoint* has become to tactical action what *Half-Life* was to shooters. Fight on foot or in tanks, fly planes or even direct an entire platoon, this game is total war – in your face and on a massive scale. The graphics are an acquired taste, but they convey a sense of wide-open warfare perfectly. It's the ultimate military simulation, with a stunning atmosphere and superb missions.

PUB Codemasters DEV Bohemia Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 104

RAINBOW SIX: RAVEN SHIELD



All the style and presentation you would expect from a Tom Clancy game, from the realism of the weapons down to footprints in the snow. A tactical and atmospheric game that can be frustratingly tricky at times.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft Montreal

PCZ ISSUE 127

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS: DELUXE



This revamp of *H&D* removes all of the infamous bugs from the original, as well as including three extra campaigns. There's been a lot of work put in to improving the graphics and modding fans will relish the new editor that ships with this edition.

PUB Take 2 DEV Illusion Softworks

PCZ ISSUE 115

HOSTILE WATERS



A brilliant RTS/action game you can play purely strategically or up close and personal. Inspired by the 16-bit classic *Carrier Command*, it's just a shame there aren't any multiplayer options.

PUB Rage DEV Rage Software

PCZ ISSUE 101

GIANTS: CITIZEN KABUTO



This mammoth and original 3D action/strategy game includes RTS, RPG, real-time and third-person shooter combat elements. It's also rather funny and features near-naked women with blue skin.

PUB Interplay DEV Planet Moon Studios

PCZ ISSUE 95

DRIVING GAMES

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY



PS2 owners will finally stop gloating when they see *Vice City*'s glorious PC incarnation. *GTA3* was an incredible crim-sim; so incredible that it was hard to see how it could be improved, but the freedom and variety of its follow-up is blinding. Whether it's carrying out its remarkably inventive law-breaking missions or just shooting pedestrians, *Vice City* is about as close to gaming perfection as you can get.

PUB Rockstar Games DEV Rockstar North

PCZ ISSUE 131

GRAND THEFT AUTO III



It may have been overshadowed by its younger brother, but *Grand Theft Auto III* remains as awesome as it ever was. It's a great spin on both driving and shooting genres and you'll still love its noisy orgy of violence and speed.

PUB Rockstar Games DEV Rockstar North

PCZ ISSUE 117

COLIN MCRAE 3



Featuring some of the best handling we've ever seen, as well as an excellent new career mode, *Colin McRae 3* is a must-have racer. Driving conditions are realistic, the tracks are varied and the detail overwhelming.

PUB Codemasters DEV Codemasters

PCZ ISSUE 131

GRAND PRIX 4



You won't find a more accurate racing sim. Graphically lush and full of anal detail, Geoff Crammond's latest effort offers in-depth telemetry and a staggering number of options. *Grand Prix 4* is leading the grid in the world of racing sims.

PUB Atari DEV Simergy

PCZ ISSUE 119

MIDNIGHT CLUB 2



This high octane illegal street-racer is immense fun, with all the cars, ramps and upgrades that you could imagine. With a top soundtrack to boot, this is one of the most addictive driving games on the market.

PUB Rockstar DEV Rockstar North

PCZ ISSUE 133

SPORT

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4



A major revamp for the legendary football management series that sees the introduction of a new top-down match engine, which lets you watch how your players are performing – and it works like a dream. *Championship Manager 4* is as life-sappingly addictive as it ever was, and the only real downside is the reduced transfer market activity, which is thanks to the financial crisis currently gripping football.

PUB Eidos DEV Sports Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 128

VIRTUA TENNIS



Who would have believed that this console favourite would translate so well to the PC? Its control interface is supremely intuitive, while the AI is massively challenging. Best of all, though, are its truly sublime multiplayer options.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Hiltmaker/Strangelite

PCZ ISSUE 114

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3



This third edition of Tony Hawk's classic skateboarding game is an absolute joy to play. It features enormous levels, more interaction than ever before and a totally kick-ass soundtrack.

PUB Activision DEV Neversoft Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 98

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2004



NEW ENTRY Each *Tiger* game seems to be getting progressively easier, but this latest effort is eminently playable. With superb graphical touches, an immersive career mode and courses that feel 'alive', it's difficult to put down.

PUB EA Sports DEV Headgate Studios

PCZ ISSUE 135

FIFA 2003



This latest offering in the *FIFA* series seems to have been influenced by *Pro Evolution Soccer 2* on the PS2. *FIFA 2003*'s immaculate presentation, realistic players and solid gameplay make it the best football game on the PC.

PUB Electronic Arts DEV EA Sports

PCZ ISSUE 122





GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

CARMAGEDDON

The Pope tried to ban it, and **PC ZONE** awarded it Game Of The Year back in 1997. Steve Hill fondly recalls the game that put the car into carnage

GAME Carmageddon

DEVELOPER Stainless Software

PUBLISHER SCI

RELEASED 1997

INFLUENCED By pushing the boundaries of common decency, the wanton butchery arguably paved the way for the likes of *GTA3* and *State Of Emergency*, while the over-the-top four-wheeled action influenced the likes of *Midtown Madness* and *Midnight Club II*. The physics engine developed for the game was also revolutionary at the time, prompting many developers to pursue this direction for their own games.

PROFILE

As head honcho at Stainless Software, resident loony Patrick Buckland is widely regarded as the driving force behind *Carmageddon*. He was ably abetted by Stainless co-founder Neil Barnden though, the pair heading up the design team deep in the darkest recesses of The Isle Of Wight. Since then, they have knocked out a sequel and expansion pack, sold the company to the VIS entertainment group (best known for *State Of Emergency*), made a racing game for EA and reformed the company as Stainless Games. Patrick is still the CEO of the slightly renamed outfit, and is again working together with Neil on an undisclosed driving game.



NAME Patrick Buckland

ROLE ON CARMAGEDDON

"Lead programmer and co-designer, chief blowing things-up officer, company swearing expert, consultant hairy person."

FIRST GAME WORKED ON *Liberator*
INFLUENCES "Monty Python, Tom & Jerry, *Mad Max*, *Death Race 2000*, my own Banger. Racing experiences, a pact with Satan, mind-altering drugs, and abduction by some particularly perverted aliens."



NAME Neil Barnden

ROLE ON CARMAGEDDON

Co-designer

FIRST GAME

WORKED ON

Crystal Crazy - The Quest Continues
INFLUENCES "Monty Python, Spike Milligan, *The Young Ones*, *Blackadder*, a healthy interest in fast cars and things exploding."

'THE NASTIEST DRIVING

GAME IN THE WORLD... EVER!' It's quite a claim, but at the time of *Carmageddon*'s release there could be very little argument. Indeed, it's a boast that still bears examination today, as for sheer gratuitous nastiness few games have come close, before or since. Even fewer have been as funny, and *Carmageddon* occupies a rare position of being deeply immoral yet highly amusing. That it managed this largely through the medium of wholesale pedestrian slaughter is no small achievement. After all, running people over isn't funny, is it? Is it?

"Black humour is one of the things that keeps us all sane," claims co-designer Patrick Buckland. "*Carmageddon* really isn't so different from Laurel & Hardy you know, in that we laugh at it for the same reasons. Also, driving is something that most of us do. And we've all seen that bloody stupid old bloke hobbling across the road in front of us and shouted, 'F--k off you coffin-dodging old ---! Get out of my f--king way! I don't care what f--king war you fought in you whingeing wanker, I've got a f--king pub to get to, now f--k off!'"

Something of an extreme attitude, perhaps, but one that clearly infused itself into the game. Apart from an irrational hatred of slow-moving war veterans, Patrick claims that the idea for *Carmageddon* also came "from me hating driving games. Every time I played them, I got bored after half a lap, turned my car around and tried to head-on the pack coming the other way. Due to shite collision detection and zero physics in the games at that time, this was rarely satisfying, so I set out to write a game where this was the actual core gameplay mechanic".

"I was into some pretty banzai Banger Racing at the time, specialising in yanks, Jags and '60s British classics. I decided to try to capture some of the excitement of this in the game. It was signed up as

3D Destruction Derby. SCI then tried to procure the *Mad Max* licence for it, and when this failed they tried for *Death Race 2020*, the planned sequel to the classic *Death Race 2000*. Eventually this fell through as well, so we all thought, 'Sod it, let's just do it anyway.' Neil thought of the name *Carmageddon*, which I hated at the time, but I love it now!"

APPETITE FOR DESTRUCTION

Co-designer Neil Barnden has similar memories of the game's original inception: "We put together a very basic demo for *3D Destruction Derby*, which had three different cars trundling round a very basic oval track. The player was able to chase 'em in their car and twat 'em, and the opponent cars crumpled on impact. The demo featured the 'PratCam', where you got to see the driver - in this case, me - reacting to the impacts, which helped add the humour we wanted to convey. On the strength of touting this demo around ECTS we got some publisher interest, but it was SCI that most quickly signed on the dotted line."

Given the final content of the game, it was a brave move by SCI. However, far from attempt to tone down the violence, it seems that SCI actively encouraged it. According to Patrick, "Early on in the development you actually *lost* points for hitting pedestrians, but it was Rob Henderson of SCI - now boss of Smoking Gun - who said, 'F--- it, let's just go the whole hog and reward the player for killing people.' Good old Rob."

The pedestrian collisions were an aspect of the game that the team set about recreating with some gusto, as Neil recalls: "In order that our sprite-based pedestrians be made to look incredibly lifelike (ahem), we based them on video frame grabs of ourselves 'in action' in the lorry car park outside our office. As part of this highly technical process, we enlisted the help of our friend Tony - who was also

"The censors said the idea of gaining reward for killing innocent people was unacceptable"



Who would have thought running people over would be so damn funny?

the in-game face of Max Damage – as stuntman. Wearing professional stuntman padding (cardboard boxes stuffed up his jumper) and using Patrick's Chevrolet Caprice station wagon as stunt vehicle, we proceeded to run Tony over. Many times. While my colleague filmed from the passenger seat, Tony encouraged me to drive into him at higher and higher speeds, as he was determined to roll completely over the roof of the car. That's the kind of guy Tony is.

"In the end, I drove at him fast enough that he crashed straight through the windscreen. This, and the office workers in the building overlooking the car park calling the police, signalled that we'd 'got it in the can' for the reference material."

"What I should add to this is that it was my road car," says Patrick. "Which I then drove up to the local windscreen repair shop with this bloody great person-sized dent in the glass. 'What the hell happened here?' 'You don't want to know...' Amazingly, rather than immediately phoning the cops and reporting a possible hit and run, he just dutifully replaced it!"

As if the in-game violence wasn't enough, it seems that the appetite for destruction was also rife in reality, with the team seemingly losing their minds on a regular basis. As Patrick casually lists, "There was the shooting of the chandelier. First with air guns, and then with a homemade rocket launcher. And the way we got the footage for whiplash on the PratCam – belting Tony around the back of the neck with the thick end of a pool

CAR TROUBLE

FUTURE CARMAGEDDON STALLED?

With GTA3 and *Vice City* stealing the violent automotive thunder over the past couple of years, it would appear that the future of the 'running people over' genre would lie squarely with Rockstar, as emphasised with the recent *Midnight Club II*. Elsewhere, there isn't a great deal of activity in the field, and Stainless appears to have ground to a halt in attempting to resurrect it. According to Patrick Buckland: "We were working on a game that very much carries on the *Carmageddon* tradition, but currently it's on hold due to the general problems in the development industry at the moment. We're trying to get publisher support right now, so please everybody write to all the publishers, telling them how wonderful Stainless is, and how they really must sign us up to produce this game." The PC ZONE mailbox is open.



At the time, the car damage system was a revelation.

cue. And the computer equipment thrown over balconies while working late at night. And the placing of a microwave oven on top of a car that we'd set fire to the week before, filling the microwave with petrol and camping gas cylinders, taping oxyacetylene-filled balloons to it, and turning it on. But we're a perfectly normal, sensible development company. Honest."

BANNED ON THE RUN

Amazingly, the game did actually make it to completion, but getting it on the shelves was to provide an even greater challenge in the shape of the notorious British Board of Film Classification.

"I had to attend a meeting at their London office with the late James Ferman, the man whose signature famously graced the BBFC certificate for many years," recalls Neil. "When the game was submitted to them, they

refused to allow it to be released. I admit my recollection of the details of the meeting is hazy. As we were about to go into Ferman's office, I noticed my flies were completely open, and spent the whole meeting preoccupied with whether the Great Man would notice this too and assume I was making some sort of grand gesture. This, and what followed, made it a surreal occasion. They asserted that the idea of gaining reward for killing innocent people was unacceptable. In order to make their point that the game was morally bankrupt, they had one of their staff, a young guy, play the game in front of us all. He was clearly having a whale of a time, going for 'artistic impression' bonuses, giggling gleefully as old ladies exploded across his bonnet. James Ferman stood with us behind him, straight-faced, explaining to us how this man was being 'corrupted' by the experience. And the young man agreed: 'Yes, it's really not... TAKE THAT, BITCH!... possible... OW, SHIT!... for us to accept... HAH! BASTARD!... the game in it's current... TWAT! YESSS!... form.'

"Our explanation that the game was meant to be a surreal comedy experience fell on deaf ears," recalls Neil. "Without changes that would deal with their central objection, the game could not be given a certificate, and so would not be released."

It was perhaps for the best that Patrick Buckland wasn't at the meeting. As he says, "Neil did all that stuff, which suited me fine, as I would probably have driven a large vehicle through their building had I been directly on the receiving end of their double standards. We once got a hard time from them because Ferman had spent 'all morning having to watch



The on-screen carnage was reflected in the team's real-life antics (left).



No one, man or beast, was safe from Carmageddon's clutches.

hardcore gay pornography'. Poor dear. I bet the twat was just embarrassed because it gave him a hard-on the size of a policeman's truncheon..."

ZOMBIE NIGHT

Back to the matter in hand, and both Stainless and Sci were faced with a problem, namely the lack of a game. A compromise had to be reached and the concerned parties eventually agreed to replace the pedestrians with zombies, replete with censor-pleasing green blood.

According to Neil, "The zombies were created over the course of one long angst-ridden weekend as the solution to this impasse with the BBFC. Already dead, and filled with nothing more offensive than pus, the zombies were deemed acceptable victims for the young homicidal racing-game fans of Great Britain.

As Patrick remembers, "They took out an injunction on us. Sci's offices were actually raided, and at one stage they threatened [CEO] Jane Cavanagh with jail! The zombies were bloody irritating. If red blood is good enough for *The Holy Grail*, it's good enough for us."

Carmageddon was finally released to critical and commercial acclaim and, following a successful appeal by Sci against the BBFC's ruling, the full-gore pedestrian version eventually made it into the shops. An instant favourite here at PC ZONE, it received a whacking 95% review score, with Duncan MacDonald boldly claiming that "*Carmageddon* is God".

Other more low-rent publications were less complimentary though, and the inevitable lazy tabloid backlash promptly ensued, something that Patrick found "absolutely bloody hilarious! Especially 'BAN DEATH GAME - POPE'. One of the funniest was that Age Concern officially complained to us because we were depicting the running-over of old people".

Similarly, Neil thought that the tabloid coverage was "great! Uninformed, bandwagon-jumping rubbish. Just the stuff to shift more units".

And shift units it did, with the game hogging the number one spot like a blood-soaked Bryan Adams (if only). *Carmageddon* also received the ultimate accolade, picking up the coveted PC ZONE Game Of The Year, as voted for by

the readers. At a gala occasion at London's Camden Palace, the Stainless team joyously lifted the trophy, and were spotted revelling late into the night, drunk on success and cheap wine. Even Tony the stuntman got involved, doing a passable impression of Mel Gibson, who he has actually doubled for in the movies (or so he claimed).

PORNO FOR ANARCHOS

After everything had calmed down, the inevitable sequel followed, mirroring the success of the original and again lifting a

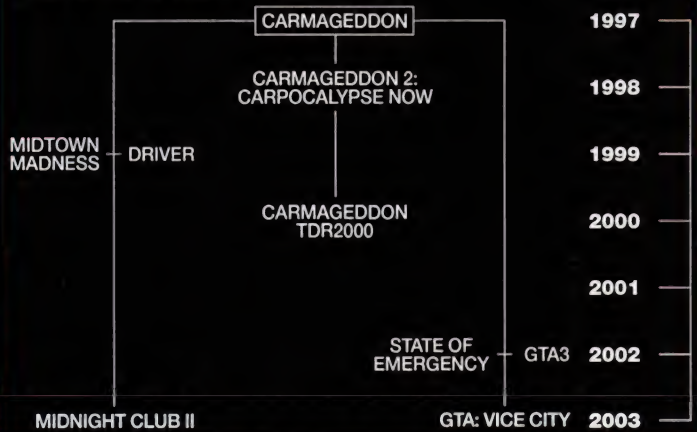
"They took out an injunction on us. Sci's offices were raided and they threatened our CEO with jail!"

PC ZONE 95% review score, with Charlie Brooker accurately summing it up as 'Pornography for Anarchists'.

There was a third *Carmageddon* game in the shape of *TDR2000*, but Stainless wasn't involved, development duties instead falling to Australian outfit Torus

FAMILY TREE

Although *Carmageddon* made the bulk of games that followed look tame in comparison, it could be said to have opened the door for free-roaming driving games with the odd splash of pedestrian carnage...



Games, with mixed results. Or, as Patrick puts it, "Absolutely f---ing dog shit. But you really shouldn't print that".

He still has fond memories of the original world-changing game though, claiming: "It has brought violence more into the mainstream. It has also shown that videogames can be genuinely hilarious - I'm not sure that any game before *Carmageddon* could reduce an

As for Neil, he is similarly full of pride.

"I was talking to a friend recently about the idea of seeing something that someone else has made," he says. "Whether it's a piece of art or a book, a videogame, a film, a television series, whatever, and being so taken with their achievement that you can see no point in continuing doing what you do. They've done such a perfect job, there's really nowhere left to go. I think you can be struck with this feeling, even if this achievement is in a field other than your own. I was discussing this, and told him that's what I expect to happen when *Half-Life 2* is released.

"At that point, I said, I will finally be able to give up making games, because there won't be any need any more. My friend's response was totally unexpected, and left me with a warm glow for the rest of the day. He said: 'But that's exactly what I felt like when I played *Carmageddon*!'"



Destroying every other car on the track was PC ZONE's preferred way of winning a 'race' in Carmageddon.

DISC PAGES

DOUBLE-TROUBLE!

The PC ZONE DVD is now double-sided, which means you get twice as much content as before. If you can't find what you're looking for on the DVD, close the PC ZONE disc browser and turn the disc over.

WORDS Suzy Wallace

DISCS Suzy Wallace

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If you are calling the helpline:

- If possible, have your PC operating and near the phone when you call.
- If this is not possible, note down all relevant information – ie system type, soundcard, RAM and so on – plus the nature of the fault.
- Have a pen and paper to hand, so you can jot down the relevant info.

MINIMUM SPECIFICATION

■ You need at least a PIII 600MHz or equivalent, with a GeForce 2MX 32MB graphics card and 128MB RAM (256MB recommended for Windows XP users) to run the software on these discs.

DISCLAIMER

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PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3

CD2/DVD Pub: Konami Dev: Konami

Reviewed: Issue 136, 90% (page 66)



Campbell doesn't quite master the off-side trap.



OK, we've got a confession to make. While proclaiming the PC as the best gaming platform in the world, we've been secretly scuttling over to sister mag C&VG for lunchtime sessions of the best football game in the world. *Pro Evolution* was a Sony exclusive, and if there was ever a reason to buy a PS2 this was it. Imagine our faces then, when Konami announced



Beckham practises his breakdancing skills.



James continues Seaman's rich legacy.

that it was releasing *PES3* on to the PC and – because of our fevered love of the game – was giving us the exclusive playable demo. Joy of joys.

The demo gives you a full five-minute match, with four

teams (including England) and two stadiums. Don't try and play it with a keyboard – plug your gamepad in, make sure the keys are mapped properly and find out why we've awarded the game a Classic rating.

FOURPLAY

THIS ISN'T FIFA AND GOALS ARE HARD TO COME BY – UNLESS YOU'VE GOT THE KNOWLEDGE...



Passing game

Try and pass the ball around using the Short Pass button to stroke the ball across the grass and create some space. Have a player on-screen to aim at, or use the radar at the bottom of the screen to pick a player out. If you can draw the defence out then go for the killer through ball.



Crossfire

If you can get the ball out wide, head for the byline and hit the Long Pass button once to deliver an automatic cross, or twice to drive a lower cross into the box. Press Shoot as it's landing on your player's head to score. Well that's the idea anyway. Who put that crossbar there?



Holy shoot

As with any footy game, getting goals is a fine art. You're not going to score from 40 yards very often (just like the real thing), but if you get near the box and there's a clear path, go for your life. Don't keep the shoot button pressed down – a tap and a direction should suffice, but practice makes perfect.



Butcher

Lost the ball? Tackle the opposition in one of three ways: run into the ball pressing the direction only; use the Short Pass button for a manual tackle; or Long Pass to slide. If you opt for the latter, time it well – the referee nearly always takes exception to a grown man's tackle coming in from behind.

FIFA 2004

CD2/DVD Pub/Dev: EA Reviewed: Issue 136, 81% (p68)

Now that *Pro Evolution Soccer* has been released on the PC, we reckon *FIFA* has been relegated to the second-best footy game on the PC, but that's just our opinion. Check *PES* out and then fire up *FIFA* to see how you think they compare. And we'll try to resist saying 'told you so' afterwards. To be fair, this is still a quality game – it's the best *FIFA* incarnation yet, and the slick presentation and official licence helps drive the action along. This demo gives you the opportunity to take your place in history as you play a four-minute

half of the 2003 Champions League final when Juventus clashed head-on with AC Milan.



A Racey Rocket. (Whaddya mean 'obscure'?)

EXCLUSIVE



The Champions League final – inevitably without Arsenal.

LORDS OF EVERQUEST

CD1/DVD Pub: Ubisoft Dev: Rapid Eye Entertainment



Looks like the Norrath equivalent of a rave.

This new RTS from the creators of *EverQuest* captures some of the atmosphere that earned *EQ* the nickname of 'EverCrack'.

You start in control of Lord Skass, a particularly friendly looking chap with scaly blue skin and a penchant for destroying things, although you soon meet up with your ogre buddies to create a bit of a sinister mob. Controls follow the lead of

most standard strategy games – left-click on a character to select and then right-click to move/attack. Experience is awarded by killing enemies, and would we truly have it any other way? Gaining experience for helping old ladies across the road is only suitable for scouts – we like to maim and kill!

Being a natural born leader, you also exude an aura that boosts comrade's morale, but negatively affects enemies – when troops are near enough to be affected, a circular indicator appears at their feet. Lord Skass fancies himself as a bit of a Blaine and has a small repertoire of spells, from resurrecting skeletons as personal bodyguards to siphoning life out of people to add to his own. Nice.



Pac-Man's unhappy children live in Vegas.



Not bad, but where's the Jacuzzi?

VEGAS\$: MAKE IT BIG

CD1/DVD Pub: Empire Dev: Deep Red Reviewed: Issue 135, 84%

This is the casino simulation that will have dollar signs flashing in your eyes. Featuring two levels, the tutorial level starts you off with a small cheap hotel, just enough to keep the married men happy with their bit on the side, and then a head office, so you can smirk as the wedding rings are tossed in the bin – until you have your first casino built.

Once built, you can choose your hardware from slot machines to craps, blackjack and videogames (yes!). Just remember to provide for the little buggers as they swarm around your casino, as gamblers are a fussy bunch in this game and anything from litter to smells to noise will put them off spending their dollars.



HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED

CD1/DVD Pub: Microsoft **Dev:** Gearbox **Reviewed:** Issue 135, 84%



If you go down to the woods today...

After nearly two years, *Halo* has finally returned home to its PC roots. With a single-player mission (The Silent Cartographer), multiplayer mission (Blood Gulch), plenty of weapons and the odd vehicle, this eagerly awaited demo should be enough for you to make up your own mind as to whether the delay was justified. Driving the Warthog is great fun – it pulls excellent power-slides and your buddy manning the gun on the back seems to be a pretty good shot, despite your attempts to make his life difficult.



Go kick some alien butt!

CHICAGO 1930

CD2/DVD Pub: Koch Media **Dev:** Spellbound



The hurricane had seriously damaged rooftops throughout Chicago.

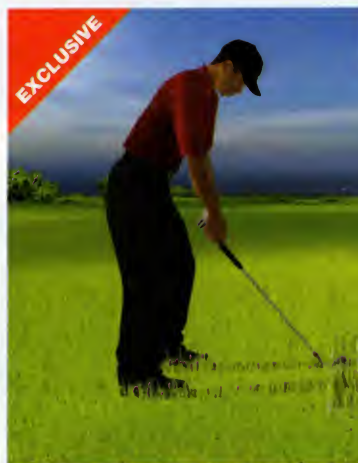
You can play as cops or baddies in *PC ZONE*'s exclusive demo of Spellbound's gangster epic. Start out with the police mission as it contains more instructions and lets you get to grips with the controls as you investigate the latest in a series of

gruesome murders. Once you've got that sussed, change sides and the real fun starts – expanding your territory in defiance of police and rival gangs and shooting lots of people. In a nod to *Max Payne*, you can switch to slow-motion mode during the gunfights.

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2004

CD2/DVD Pub: EA **Dev:** Headgate **Reviewed:** Issue 135, 81%

Tiger continues his relentless domination of the golfing world (on computer at least) with another instalment of *PGA*. This demo allows you to play through holes 16 to 18 on the St Andrews course, and the arcade feel to the game makes it surprisingly easy to pick up and play. Arguably the best golf game yet!



Tiger, tiger, burning bright, like a golfer on the... um... fairway?



Throat inspections have changed a tad.



XIII

CD2/DVD Pub: Ubisoft **Dev:** Ubisoft **Reviewed:** Issue 135, 83%

We gave you the single-player demo last month, now it's time for the multiplayer with two maps for you and up to five opponents. Bots are available to play against, although they're not the brightest sparks, and there are 15 different weapons providing you with a load of ways to make your friends go "Aaaaaa!" or "Noooooo!". Game modes are standard team or solo deathmatch.



A welcome reception awaits you in the lobby.

DVD EXCLUSIVES

ONLY AVAILABLE ON PC ZONE'S DVD EDITION. TO SUBSCRIBE, TURN TO PAGE 132. FOR FULL CONTENTS SEE BACK OF THE BOX

THE ESSENTIAL SELECTION

The PC ZONE DVD is now double-sided. On one side you've got all the new content, but flip it over and you'll find the Essential Selection – the best demos and mods the world has ever created, along with all the patches, drivers and utilities you need to make your PC a shrine of gaming goodness.

APOCALYPTICA

DVD Pub: Konami **Dev:** Extreme FX

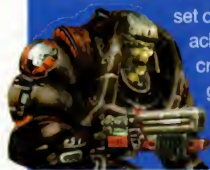
Church was never like this when we were kids! Sometime in the distant future, nuns and monks decide to throw away their cassocks and habits in favour of hulking great armour, swords and guns. Instead of preaching and praying, they've taken to blasting anybody who disagrees with their religious sentiments. You play the first level of this third-person action game as either the foxy Sister Celeste or beefy Brother Benedictus, each of whom are equipped with a sword for mêlées and a gun for ranged combat. You are dropped near to Jerusalem and have a distinctly unholy



Benedictus was always a bum man.



Celeste does it Matrix style.



set of objectives to achieve, from crippling the power generator to infiltrating the city's sewers.

SILENT HILL 3

DVD Pub: Konami **Dev:** Konami **Reviewed:** Issue 135, 72%

In this exclusive demo, you play as Heather, a teenage girl equipped with just a knife (why God, why?) against the sick creatures dreamed up by the warped minds at Konami. The demo is set in a small section of a fairground (albeit one you wouldn't want to take your kids to) populated by rabbits that look like they've been tucking into a nice meal of AB positive. Featuring thoroughly disturbing scenery, the obligatory creepy fog and some warped monsters with a bit of an attitude problem, this demo delivers a dose of nerve-jangling tension.



"I've just cacked me pants."



"Now don't touch my lipplie again."

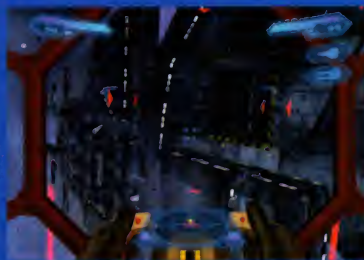
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MACE GRIFFIN : BOUNTY HUNTER

DVD Pub: VU Games **Dev:** Warthog **Reviewed:** Issue 135, 76%



New reverse parking aid for ladies.



Gone in 60 seconds.

Mace Griffin might be a dumb name but this two-stage demo is a different matter. Your day's work starts off in a space base, where you are equipped with what appears to be a large microphone and something more useful – guns. You have to steal a fighter ship and destroy the enemy ships before settling back into a spot of FPS action.



SPACE COLONY

DVD Pub: Gathering **Dev:** Firefly Studios **Reviewed:** Issue 136, 82% (p87)

It might look like *The Sims* from the outside but *Space Colony* has a warped sense of humour that we love. As well as looking after their own personal wants, you have to build and develop your base, while simultaneously keeping nasty aliens at bay. You get three levels in this demo, complete with a raft of interesting characters, buildings, excellent animation and amusing ways to keep your colonists happy.



Phew! Now that's a journey to work!



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THE RETURN OF THE LIONHEAD DIARIES

By our calculations, the epic *Black & White 2* is about a year away from completion – and Lionhead is ready to take you behind the scenes to show how a game is made. Your guide is storytwriter John McLean-Foreman



IT'S PROBABLY best to begin with an introduction. My name is John McLean-Foreman, and I was an

entertainment and videogame journalist for about six years. In the early part of 2001 I decided that making money and eating were cliché, so I left journalism behind and became a full-time fiction writer. I sacrificed anything remotely resembling a normal life – girls, leaving the house, talking to real people, style – and by January 2003 I was fortunate enough to be asked to write the story for *Black & White 2*.

The challenge that I'm faced with in writing these diaries is how best to cover the myriad topics you'll be interested in: the creation of music and sound, 3D, AI, storytelling, round-table discussions, working with actors, animation, testing, impending deadlines, the fans themselves – it goes on. On the whole, I'll be focusing on many of the personalities here in the office and what they do. After all, if you don't really know who any of us are, why would you care what we've got to say?

I'VE GOT THE POWER

If you don't know, *Black & White 2* is a game that enables you to play God, controlling the lives of all the tiny mortals that worship you (insert optional manic laughter here). The power is in your hands, the choices are yours, and whether you decide to be good or evil, it's your actions that directly affect the outcome.

Although Peter Molyneux (the lead designer of *B&W2* and CEO of Lionhead) always envisioned *Black & White* to be a series of five games, the second incarnation was officially born late one

night back in January 2002. Prior to that first planned *B&W2* meeting, though, the development team spent several weeks trolling through the online forums disguised as fans. They dropped suggestions – some first-class, some deliberately awful – to get an unbiased feel for what the real fans would like to see in the next game.

CIGARETTES AND ALCOHOL

Armed with the ideas gleaned from the forums as well as scads of their own, the development team got together, drank copious amounts of alcohol and debated what they wanted the sequel to be. Out of that drunken night came the first version of *Black & White 2* (see boxout).

Lionhead prefers to do relaxed brainstorming sessions away from the distractions of the office, phones and emails. Apart from being good fun, it really gives everyone an opportunity to relax and voice opinions they might not otherwise get a chance to share.

As is the case with all such sessions, a bad idea, or often a joke, will spark another idea that then sparks another and another. When Jonty Barnes (head of the *B&W2* studio) made reference to the opening scene of *The Fellowship Of The Ring*, the part where Sauron single-handedly decimates the forces of man and elves, everyone leapt on the idea.

"Exactly!" said Molyneux. "Your creature needs to be able to do that and more. It needs to have the potential to become your ultimate military unit."

The topic moved on to what was missing in *B&W1*, and how the sequel really needed to feel epic. We decided that the player should feel like a god rather than Mr Big Hand who has to run around doing chores at the whim of mortals. No more would the player be hunting lost sheep; he or she would instead be involved in events deserving of a god's attention. Events like altering the course of a world already deeply enmeshed in war. Nothing big...

BRAIN DRAIN, BABY

As the evening progressed, new ideas continued to flow. For instance, the Creature needed to be more help than hindrance; the Creature interface had to be more open and accessible; and an epic story would become an integral part of the game, battles would involve hundreds and thousands of soldiers on every side, players needed to be given reasons to become emotionally attached to major and minor characters... By the time that brainstorming session was over, the seeds of the design had been sown.

As I'm sure you know, *Black & White* is a magical world that runs parallel to our own and continues to evolve in the same

NO SHADE OF GREY

WE SAT, WE DRANK AND WE BRAINSTORMED *B&W2*. THIS IS WHAT WE CAME UP WITH...

- EPIC
- The whole world is at war and religion is the catalyst
- Good = build, nurture, protect
- Evil = kill, destroy, conquer
- Creature is player's greatest General
- More difficult to get villagers to believe in you
- Alignment reflected throughout the game
- All player actions visually reveal their good and evil effects
- Review game interface
- Villagers more charismatic and refined
- Villagers less hassle to the player
- Distinct differences between villages, towns and cities
- Detailed town behaviour
- Towns have walls and roads
- New Resource of Iron Ore/Metal

way that ours does. That evolution means conflict, and conflict means war. And war? War means that the little people of the original *B&W*, who were just too damn nice, clearly needed an overhaul.

Now there are armies chock-full of violent little combatants for you or your Creature to command, but how you use those armies to gain supremacy in the world is totally up to you. If you're a *Sim City* kind of player, you can ignore a large part of the warfare by creating cities so wondrous that the enemy populace will become disenchanted with their lot in life, abandon their homes and set up shop in your land. If, on the other hand, you're as aggressive as I plan to be, you can lay siege to enemy towns, impose your will upon the conquered and then feed the remaining troublemakers to your Creature.

Well, that's *Black & White 2* in a nutshell: are you going to be a god of war or a god of peace? Either way, you'll play through your own unique and epic world. There's so much more I'd like to tell you, but because game development is an evolutionary process and our design document is constantly being updated, you'll need to come back month-by-month as I lay out the latest steps in the making of *Black & White 2*. ☑



The new engine is almost in place. Stay tuned for the stunning new shots.

"Out of that drunken night came the first version of *B&W2*"

JOHN MCLEAN-FOREMAN
STORYWRITER, LIONHEAD



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PlayStation 2

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Kingdom Hearts
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SOCOM
Soul Calibur II

GameCube Game Of The Year

The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker
Metroid Prime
Resident Evil 0
Soul Calibur II
Super Monkey Ball 2
TimeSplitters 2

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Command & Conquer Generals
Championship Manager 4
GTA: Vice City
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Panzer Dragoon Orta
Shenmue II
Soul Calibur II
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Advance Wars 2
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DOOMDARK'S REVENGE

A dish served as cold as ice

WITH ITS magnificent arctic views across a vast 6,000-location gameworld, massive pitched battles and a deep storyline that had you roaming the icy wastes recruiting lords and barons to defeat the evil Shareth the Heartstealer, *Doomdark's Revenge* remains one of the most unique fantasy war games in computer gaming history. Even if it does look about as appealing as a naked Ukrainian pensioner smeared in tripe.



Despite the complete lack of sound effects and a setting based entirely within a bleak icy kingdom, *Doomdark's Revenge* was, like its predecessor *The Lords Of Midnight*, full of tension and atmosphere. Its unique appeal being the ease with which its creator Mike Singleton managed to weave elements of story-driven adventure with grand sweeping strategy and fit it all

into a 3D world. Of course the first-person perspective was crude; movement was tile-based and there was no animation whatsoever. Tactical options were virtually nonexistent (line-of-sight and elevation being unheard of) and weight of numbers usually won the battles.

"It was a world brought to life like never before"

RETRO ZONE

JANUARY 1985

Astride his C5, sporting big hair and fingerless gloves, **Richie Shoemaker** rides through the annals of game history once again...

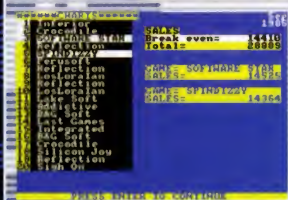
But it was a world brought to life like never before, a sprawling and epic adventure that allowed impressive exploration and demanded only your imagination in return.

Doomdark's Revenge formed the second episode in what was to be an epic trilogy; alas the third game, *Eye Of The Moon*, never materialised, much to the chagrin of Spectrum fans everywhere (I'm still a little miffed about it now). A sequel of sorts finally appeared on the PC in 1995, rather belatedly, in the form of *Lords Of Midnight: The Citadel*, but it was a disappointing game that failed to capture the mood of the 8-bit adventures.

Aside from a couple of home-spun remakes (all of which can be found via www.icemark.com), it appears the lands of *Midnight* have all but defrosted.



THE BEST OF THE REST



SOFTWARE STAR

(Spectrum/Amstrad/C64)

Just as famous for his creepy ads as for the game itself, *Football Manager's* Kevin Toms was back with his latest game. Managing a games studio was the theme this time and although the game was just as basic as its footballing cousin, it had none of its addictive qualities. Shallow and less than realistic (you couldn't bribe reviewers for instance) it was even less successful. In fact it was absolutely bloody awful.



MATCH DAY

(Spectrum/C64/BBC/Amstrad)

Pro Evo, *Sensi*, *Kick Off* – legendary titles in football's vast history of computer titles, but there is one more to add to complete the hall of fame: Jon Ritman's *Match Day*. It wasn't only the first half-decent attempt to capture the excitement of an after-school kickabout, but a 3D game to boot. Plus it featured a crude rendition of the MOTD theme – what more could you have asked for?



SOFTAID

(Spectrum/C64)

Ten games for a fiver, including the excellent *3D Tank Duel*, *Ant Attack*, *Gilligan's Gold* (pictured above) and the 15-level *The Pyramid*, three quid of which went to charity. Plus at the end of the cassette was a well-known ditty called *Do They Know It's Christmas?*. Judging by the emaciated Ethiopian on the cover, we guessed not – especially since it wasn't.



FINDERS KEEPERS

(Spectrum/C64)

Until this platform adventure came along, most new budget releases were uninspired remakes. *Finders Keepers* (above) and its star *Magic Knight* changed all that with some colourful animation and innovative adventuring and storyline. Three sequels followed and the *Magic Knight* games achieved cult status. In terms of gameplay, it was a pound-for-pound equal with the more commercially successful *Dizzy* games.

NEWSFLASH

IT'S JAN 1985 AND...

- Nintendo announces it will bring the Famicom console to the West (the US anyway) in November.
- The Microshield VDU Smock, a radiation-proof tabard for computer users designed to cut down on monitor radiation, is released. Significantly it failed to protect the face. And it looked bloody silly.
- A survey commissioned by Acorn concludes that 25% of Spectrums sold are faulty and the most reliable are the BBC and Electron. Acorn make the BBC and Electron. D'oh!
- The advertisers for the game *Worse Things Happen At Sea* are lambasted for the tagline: 'For added realism play this game in the bath.' No fatalities were recorded.
- Ocean Software announces the release of an 'animated strategy adventure... based on the concept of life imitating art'. Its name: *Frankie Goes To Hollywood*.

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PREVIOUSLY ON MR CURSOR...

N'gango and his son, Dabola, revealed their plan: using a modified multiplayer version of *Vice City* (now retitled *Freetown*), they hoped to obtain data on any cheating American teenage gamers. Using this information, the idea was to entice the 20 worst offenders to Sierra Leone, where they would be killed. Or worse.



(He's afraid of Sierra Leone)

MR CURSOR

GAME ON

"Eat worm you sorry-arsed motherf****," came the shrill voice through the speakers.

N'gango threw his mouse to one side. "The damnable Yankee brat! I have had enough of this! No sooner have I moved than I am dead. And then comes the insult."

"Have you tagged him, father?" asked Dabola.

"I am doing so now," N'gango replied, tapping some keys.

We are in one of the massive rooms of the Sierra Leone underground complex. I am at a desk to the left of N'gango, and to his right is his son, Dabola. There are about 60 computer desks in this room, manned, in the main, by Sierra Leone youths aged between 12 and 14. Elsewhere in the complex it's the same story: there are 256 computers in all... 256 Sierra Leoneans in this one African location versus 256 Americans scattered throughout the USA.

N'gango got up from his chair and walked behind mine, looking into my monitor.

"My friend," he says. "I see you are as yet not dead."

"No, I'm hiding in the basement of the hospital," I reply, sheepishly.

"You would not mind, I hope, if I were to take the controls from you," he asks. It's a rhetorical question, of course... it's not as if I'm in the position to say no, after all. So I get up and N'gango sits down, taking the mouse.

No sooner has he done this, than his in-game soldier jerks back, decapitated by a shotgun blast.

"Suck my dick you dumbass piece of shit!" shrieks the shooter.

N'gango slams his fist into the desk: "This will not do," he booms fiercely.

"This is a mockery of all I hold sacred. That shot was most clearly from without – it was through the wall – through possibly many walls... and maybe even from many miles!"

"Tag him father, tag him," prompts Dabola, busy with problems of his own.

FRAGS AND TAGS

The game goes on for much of the day. I stroll with N'gango through the various rooms of the labyrinth, watching on numerous monitors as the battle continues and more and more American kids are, unbeknownst to them, tagged.

Slightly alarming to me is the fact that 90 per cent of the Sierra Leone contingent have real weapons lying on the floor next to their feet: machetes, pistols of varying sizes, and, in the main, AK-47s.

N'gango obviously notices my concern. "Yankies have more guns than do we, my friend," he says. "You do not see them because they are hidden away in their

houses, but they are there nevertheless."

FINISHING TOUCHES

The game of *Freetown* is played many times over the course of the following week, with the Americans – as planned – winning most of the matches. Then the tagging figures are collated, giving N'gango the names, addresses and credit details of 20 of the most obnoxious and cheating combatants.

These kids are notified – again as planned – of their inclusion into the *Freetown* grand final. Claiming to take place in a lavish hotel in Morocco, with all expenses paid, the ultimate winner of the 'event' is to receive an embellished solid gold ingot worth \$50,000.

Of the 20 contacted, 12 take the bait. Arrangements are made and the players and their guardians are flown on various airlines on various routes from various US cities to Heathrow in London, where they enjoy a night at the Hilton. The next day, they're Morocco bound, landing eventually at Marrakech.

It is here that the guardians (ie the dads) are separated from their charges. Two Twin Otter aircraft are used for this stage of the operation. The guardians are flown into the interior of the Sahara, somewhere in Algeria, where they are dropped off with no water. ("And with very little hope of survival," adds N'gango, when he explains all this to me. Incidentally, it's at this point that all their credit accounts are emptied).

The second Twin Otter is filled with the 12 *Freetown* 'finalists', and their destination is to be the dusty landing strip 500 metres beyond N'gango's underground HQ.

ARRIVE & DEPART

"They will be here very shortly, my friend," says N'gango, slipping his mobile back into

his trouser pocket. Everyone in the complex wants to come out to the airstrip, but N'gango insists they mostly stay back.

Thus the 'welcoming committee' (for want of a better word) consists of N'gango himself, Dabola, six of Dabola's best friends (unarmed) and me.

"This is where we must say our goodbyes," says N'gango, unexpectedly. "The plane that brings in the Yankees is the plane on which you will leave. It will take you to Morocco. From there you may wish to go to Spain. I believe you will find life there to your liking."

"OK, but what exactly are you going to do to these kids?" I ask.

"It is better that you do not know, but it is for the good of the whole world," he replies.

Dabola and his friends laugh raucously at this, while N'gango manages to look slightly guilty.

And then the Twin Otter comes into sight. It nears, slows, wobbles and touches down, sending up a large cloud of orange dust, which is magnified by the heat haze. The *Freetown* 'finalists' disembark, study their surroundings, and then stride cockily towards us.

"Go now, my friend," says N'gango, urgently.

So I leave. Quickly. The Yanks study me as I pass them. I can't help but glance at them briefly.

I am still looking back as I near the plane, and I watch as N'gango offers a friendly handshake to the tallest one. His polite gesture is ignored completely.

The plane's engines are by now drowning out most sounds, but before I board I just about make out a snippet from the gangly American: "Bring it on, dude. Game on. I'm going to kick your motherf**** ass!"

THE END.

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